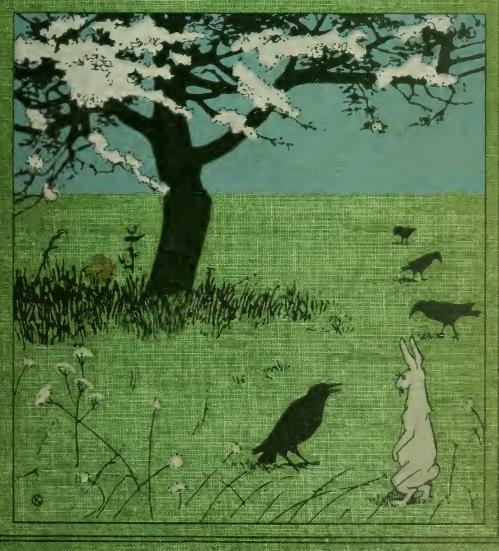


IN ATURE'S RESAUL MARKES GABBOTT



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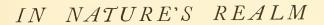
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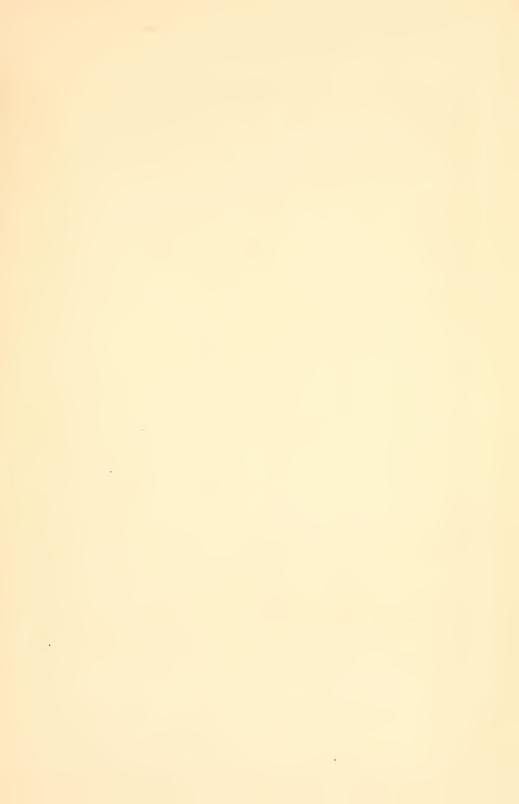
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THE RELIGIOUS CONTRACTOR AND ADDRESS OF THE PERSON WITHOUT THE PERSON OF THE PERSON OF

# In Nature's Realm

Care lifts her burdens from my shoulders now
When to the fields I hasten on my way,
Nor ask a shelter but the leafy bough,
Nor friend, save Nature, through the live-long day

BY

## CHARLES CONRAD ABBOTT

Author of "Upland and Meadow," "Notes of the Night," "Outings at Odd Times," etc.

WITH NINETY DRAWINGS BY

OLIVER KEMP



ALBERT BRANDT: PUBLISHER
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY
1900



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#### PREFACE

MY DAYS—Elysian days to me—afield or afloat, were followed by nights no less delightful, when, at my desk, I again lived my happy hours. My entertainment, therefore, has been two-fold, and so I am moved to hope that the satisfaction of the reader who turns these pages to the light will at least be single-fold.

Here, however, a word of caution. No book concerning Nature is in any sense a mirror reflecting every detail. The many subtle charms the rambler recognizes, when under the bright blue sky, are not brought home with him. He cannot pierce with a pencil-point many an impression as you may pin a butterfly.

Here, too, let me call attention to the danger of being so far off our guard that confusion arises from a multiplicity of objects; all of commanding interest. We cannot, however careful, wholly escape from a sense of bewilderment at times, when brilliant flowers, gorgeous butterflies, singing birds and chattering small deer crowd the landscape, nor keep our eyes steadily upon the soaring hawk when fishes are leaping above the glittering waves. To single out an object becomes impracticable, in the sense of giving it our undivided attention, under such circumstances, but confusion of thought need not arise from such embarrassment of riches. We can look upon them as a unit, as we look upon intricate machinery without special attention to any single part.

There is no one feature of an outing that leads to such satisfying results as this contemplation of nature as a whole, and the study of its component parts, if it leads not up to this, falls short of what it should do. Grub as industriously as we may at the root of a tree, if our thoughts rise no higher what becomes of the outlook where the out-reaching branches point to the clouds? I suggest this because too often the specialist forgets that his interest does not center in the world's most important form of life, and when it is written of, without regard to its relation to all else, we have a distorted view, and mole-hills are accorded the dignity of the mountain. Study beast or bird or flower, as

#### PREFACE

you decide, but never forget there are snakes and fishes and insects. The ocean is something more than the home of the pretty shells we gather upon its beach. Let your mind expand when out of doors; not be cramped to the confines of the track of a slowly-creeping snail.

If an outing is considered merely as the proper thing "to do," by all means don't do it. It is certain that you will neither see nor hear anything in such a way as to profit you. Nature resents such consideration, or lack of it, at any person's hands.

Remember, too, that Nature never slows her pace that man may catch up. The bird's song, the summer blossom, and the gorgeous sunset far oftener "waste their sweetness on the desert air" than play their several parts with him to witness them; but that book does much which makes so plain this truth that readers will be more anxious in the future to see the world as it really is; to realize that the river is something more than water and its shores something more than earth; that a forest is not merely congregated trees or the open field a farmer's workshop. These are but the outer shells that

#### PREFACE

guard with jealous care the manifold treasures and secrets awaiting him who is sincerely a lover of Nature.

For permission to reproduce certain chapters of this volume, I am deeply indebted to the Editors of *Harper's Monthly* and *Lippincott's Magazine*, and also to the Editor of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* for the use of other chapters which appeared in an abbreviated form in that journal.

C. C. A.

THREE BEECHES: TRENTON, N. J., AUGUST 2, 1900.



# CONTENTS

					Page
Preface					5
List of Drawings			. •		# I I
My Point of View					17
VIEWS AFOOT					33
FACING THE NORTH STAR					50
NINE SPRING CORNER					65
WINTER'S LAST DAY					77
An Audience of One			٠		88
A CHEERFUL FOG					95
Waste-land Revisited .					109
Sour Grapes					165
A Fence-rail Fancy					182
BEFORE THE RAIN					191
A Marsh Madrigal					199
In Nameless Nooks	,				206
THE FIRST FEW FLAKES		,			232
Icicles					256
What's in the Wind? .					268
INDEX					289



						Page
Crosswicks Creek,	(photogra	avure fro	om wash	-drawing	g. See	
page 143), .						facing title
Hornet, .						8
Flying Squirrel,						10
Cricket, .						15
Nature's Realm,						16
Sparrow-hawk,						17
	٠	his p	oint of vie	w."		
Meadow, .						18
"There	e is a wide-r	eaching m	eadow nov	v . , befor	e me.''	
1 '						19
	ence is brok	en by the	songs of co	ountless bi	rds, ''	
Yellow-breasted C	,					20
	. the love-s					
Red-eyed Vireo's						2 I
0	. an empty				• ''	0
	a song-spai					28
	a song-spar					2.0
*	of the Dism					29
Primeval Nature,			with its to	mery owr,		3 1
"Trees only?			hills :	the river at	their has	
English Sparrow a						32
Bowlders Amidfie	lds.					33
	knowle	dge i:			ot . "	33
Bowlder,		-		-		3.7
,	t us go back				ld.''	3 /
Swallow-tailed But	0					39
	The ugliest				,	3 )
Mud-wasps' Nest,						42
" . Nature, .		a sanctua	ry that is r	not open to	everyone	

					Page
Bullfrog,					44
the cro	aking bullt	rog in the	marsh .	. "	
Red-headed Duck,					49
	the bird's-	eye view	"		
The North Star,					. 50
" i	n a blue-bl	ack wintr	y sky.''		
Larks,					53
"The field-larks walke	ed the cartl	n with dig	nity and g	race,	
					5 5
" the tall w				tering	
	ore down u	pon them	,		
Spider, Fly and Beetle, .					. 57
Common Mole,					. 58
"The ridged eart	h where th	e mole ha	d traveled	11	
White-footed Mouse,					. 60
a sudden as	sumption o	f a listeni	ing attitud	e ''	
Rabbit,					. 64
" from the base of an old	stump	rushed a	veritable '	mad Marc	
					. 65
"Where the bluff			cozv noo	k ''	,
Hylódes,					. 68
	e little crep	itating fr	ng 11		
Yellow Tree-toad,					. 69
		and of the			. 09
Red Salamanders, .	isy in the t	and or the	arternoon		. 71
	kinship is	with from	. , , ,	•	. / 1
Chickadee,	Kinship is	with nog			. 76
" the chi	iokadee wa	e makina	merry	. 11	. / 0
		SIIIAKIIIS	merry, .	•	
Frozen Meadows, on the thin ice, t			e . 6 si alalas bu	*	- ,, 77
	ne crows a	re piaying	*tickly b	enders .	
Crow,		,	•	•	. 79
Fishes,					. 83
worki	ng their wa	ıy far up s	tream, .	. ''	
Indian Clay Pot,					. 84
" found in th	ne ashes of	the one-t	ime hearth	, 11	
Amulet, Red-stone Pipe an	nd Flint	Arrow-	head,		. 85
" many a b				bone.''	
Winter Sunset,					. 87
"It is t	he last day	of winter	"		

12

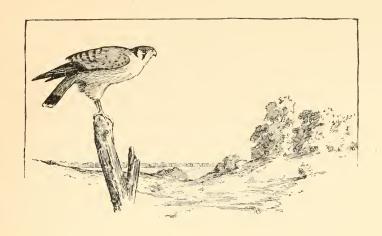
		Page
Brown Thrush, Mourning-cloak Butterfly and Garter-sn	ake,	88
"Companions cheerful enough when there was quiet, .	. "	
Gray Spider,		90
Butterflies,		92
" danced in the sunbeams,"		
Kill-dee,		94
" suddenly appeared a kill-dee plover,"		
Carolina Wren,		95
"The wren wants the whole world to hear him;	,,	
Cardinal Grosbeak,		101
"My fog-bound cardinal "		
Song-sparrow,		108
"From the mist came the trill of a field-sparrow	7.''	
Crosswicks Creek,		109
"While the day was yet fresh with morning dew	,	
Kingfisher,		115
" clattering kingfishers"		_
Bridge Pee-wee,		117
" the sitting bird, which now holds herself in a make-ready att	itude, .	. "
Frogs,		119
"Two, as I passed, were resting, only their heads expo	sed."	
Mosquitoes,		125
Mole-cricket,		127
Though the mole-crickets tunnel the earth	"	12/
Flood-gate,		129
"An old flood-gate, or what remained of it, "	•	129
Mink,		135
minks will carry fishes to the shore, "		133
Barn-swallows,		137
". five of these birds, were circling just above m	e "	1 5 /
Wood-duck,		144
" wandering water-fowl, "	•	^ + +
Cat-bird.		149
"The ever-abundant cat-birds were very tame, "		1+9
Young Green Herons and Nest,		1.7.2
" we have birds of all stages of growth in the heronr	. 11	1 5 3
Green Herons,	у -	
"Three well-grown birds in such statuesque positions	* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *	154
Sunfish		160
"Look directly in the face of a sunfish, "		100
Look directly in the face of a sunnsh,		

		rage
Sunset on Crosswicks Creek,		164
as the sun sinks behind the distant forest, "		
Fox, Sour Grapes and Blue Jay,		165
"The fable of the fox is as familiar to creatures		
not man as to ourselves; "		- 0 -
Bittersweet,	•	181
" the glory of the bittersweet"		
Cedar and Chestnut,		182
" the tall, tapcring cedar-tree"		
"Not far away still stands a splendid chestnut-tree "		
Gray Squirrel,		184
" always was this fence wild-life's highway."		
Quail,		185
" a 'Bob-white' close to the bottom rail."		
Fence-rails,		188
" a pile of rails in a field corner"		
Colonial Fireplace,		190
" as I sit before the andirons"		
		191
Before the Rain,		191
" the threatening masses of ashen clouds"		
Dragon-fly,	•	192
" dragon-flies are ecstatic"		,
One of Nature's Tragedies,		196
a luckless grasshopper,"		
Colonial Kitchen,		198
"Again the old, open fire-place is in its glory, "		
The Red-wings' Paradise,		199
" the marsh, where my little world is yet wild"		
Muskrat and House,		203
"A brave muskrat swims across the stream, "		
		205
The Crosswicks Marshes,	·	20)
"A wandering duck bars the world against the curse of solit	uae.	206
A Nameless but Suggestive Nook,		200
"The surface of the water was broken into a series		
of long, wavy lines,"		,
Water-snake,		216
the creature turned and curved"		
Black-bass,		220
" the fate of a grasshopper"		
House-flies,		221
". listen to an humbler voice, "		

						Page
Where One May Thir	ık,					231
-	"Sweet,	nameless i	nooks, '	1		
Snowflakes, .						232
**	the fi	rst few flal	kes of snow	**		
Rabbit-tracks, .						234
the	e first snov	w of suffic	ient depth t	o allow of		
	tracki	ng a rabbi	it, ''			
Jumping-mouse, .						237
the jum	ping-mous	se leap	ing high ab	ove the gra	iss.''	
Bat,						238
" its counter	nance very	suggestiv	re of compl	ete satisfac	tion.''	
Land-tortoise, .						243
↔ The land-t	ortoise tha	at my gran	dfather pla	yed with .	. ,,	
Snow-storm, .						255
" of cold day	s to come	when the	air will be	white with	them."	
Icicles, Woodshed,						256
"	the dripp	ing eaves	of the wood	shed."		
A Winter Decoration,						267
" tir	y crystal	spears, po	inting to th	e earth."		
Wild Geese, .						268
۰۰ A	ying in on	e long, ur	ichanging li	ne ''		
The South Wind,						287
"., that	gentle fair	ry who sca	attered butte	erflies '	,	
Robin,						288
Wasp,						400
						309







My Point of View

HAVE a cousin who finds satisfaction in the possession of a ruin unlike, in many respects, any other in his country—England,—so he is moved to write to me, "it is always pleasant to have something no one else has," and to this I agree. Such a feeling is easily understood, and the more so when we remember that every person has one unique possession, his own point of view.

Did we all see alike, we would all be alike, and if no differences existed the world, from an extramundane point of view, would be a flat failure. Variety is more than the spice of life, it is its neces-

sity. Stand on the edge of a mill-pond and see a few acres of mirror-like surface and my meaning is plain. We are straightway weary with looking, but let the wind ripple the waters and the eye brightens, we are no longer indifferent, and what one sees another misses. The lights and shadows that delight me are my exclusive pleasure. I am as happy in possessing my peculiar point of view as is my cousin with his splendid ruin built centuries ago by Carthusian monks.

It is ever impossible to bring another to stand towards nature as you have just done. We cannot transfer our point of view, nor can our friend make use of it. Granting this, comparisons become the staple of the best conversation possible among men. How do I know, at all, that other men see? They say that they do so, and my only resource is to accept their statement. The probabilities all point in that direction, but is it absolute certainty? Does certainty exist? Are we not finite creatures? Certainty is ascribable to the infinite alone. There is a wide-reaching meadow now, as I write these lines, before me. Its monotony is broken by a thousand trees; its color varied by ten thousand



#### MY POINT OF VIEW

flowers. The passing breezes give motion to all save the earth itself; so we say, at least; but the earth is likewise in motion. We speak of the fixity of certain features where fixity never existed. So much for exactness of statement. The silence is broken by the songs of countless birds,—but have others ever heard them with my ears, or I with theirs? Who but myself has ever heard the singing of a bird? Perhaps all other men have listened to the melody and I heard only discord. Who shall say?



In the pleasing uncertainty of our so-called certainties, let us compare notes. He sees best who sees a single object nearest to exhaustively—who, by seeing, is moved to read its past, realize its present and, without violence to extravagance, forecast its future. Then, if those who saw not find that my friend and I tell the same story, they are, very reasonably, the better satisfied. A more pleasing picture is drawn by their fancy, based upon another's point of view, but never as I have seen or my friend has seen, can they think they see. My trees and birds and flowers are mine alone. I could not give them away, did I try, nor could my friends

enrich themselves with the gift, were they desirous of so doing.

I am now alone, so far as humanity is concerned. No mortal has, as yet, wandered into my present field of vision, and so the less is there any disturbing feature. "I" can contemplate, "we" can only compare, past experience; for contemplation in another's presence falls short of completion. divided personality is equal to only a fraction of a fact. Hence the desirability of solitude when a bird or tree or landscape demands attention. Then we can really contemplate; which is to give undivided attention, and only then does the full significance become clear; unfold itself. While we gaze at an empty, long-deserted bird's nest, late in the year, the bush that holds it becomes leaved again, May blossoms brighten the background, the lovesong of the happy bird is in the air. Even the progress of the builder when at work, comes back to us and we see its wise looks as one after another ingenious and comforting touch was added.

So, too, the fluttering autumn leaf whispers to me the story of the summer, if I am alone; but it is a mere matter, all too likely, of dry statistics clog-

"... the love-song of the happy bird is in the air."



#### MY POINT OF VIEW

ging my way, if I have company. An empty nest; a dead leaf.

Thanks to the blessed gift of letters, it is possible to make intelligible to another one's own point of view, and curiosity is so far common to humanity that what others see or think they see, proves of passing interest if not of permanent advantage, and there is something beyond this in the gift of letters,

the pleasure and profit of recording the present which is never to return. No moment is lived twice.

Natura fre

Nature, from my point of view, nears perfection. That which yesterday suggested is here to-day. The theory based upon capricious April's warmth is a fact in the mid-

summer sunshine. So, at least, does the world appear from my point of view. The sky is intensely blue and vision travels so far within it, that it loses all appearance of substance and becomes azure space. The mind is freer for the thought, and unless there is unlimited space through which our minds may wander, thought is gnarly, sour fruit that is worse

than valueless. We cannot set it outside our point of view, and to realize its limitations is a source of grief. Hence dissatisfaction with our real self and the casting of covetous glances at that distorted self which possesses us; the beginning of a downward course.

Earlier or later, the individual finds himself face to face with nature, and why see as through a glass darkly, struggling to profit by another's point of view? Originality seems to have lost caste, and we are content with mangled, shapeless hearsay rather than the unmarred message that our own eyes bring to us. There are people who would accept the assertion that grass was white and the sky black did some unscrupulously aggressive person so declare. There are millions of other people in the world but why have I a mind of my own if it is to be set aside? I am what I am to nature, not what another, from his point of view judges I should be. I am a part of nature and nature a part of me. Tear us apart and nature is robbed and I am ruined. Hence the futility of attempting radical changes, for nations and countries and climates have their peculiar points of view, and the Christianized pagan is still but a

#### MY POINT OF VIEW

pagan, Christianized. His idol may be a fraud, but it will never cease to be his idol. The outward sign of respect may be withheld but the inward feeling of regard can never die. Who has yet seen the world with another's eyes? There is a cuttle-fish that can blacken the waters about it until the animal disappears, but the water is water still and the animal is only hidden, not changed nor annihilated. The oak does not ask the elm to change its leaves, nor roses red taunt the violets because they are blue, why then seek to change my point of view and blur the landscape that to me is beautiful and so a joy forever? The intensity of a personality that dwarfs others is more likely to prove a curse than a blessing. My limited individuality has its place and is not benefited by shifting it from its bearings. Nature is a better director than man in this regard. A grain of sand is in place as it goes with others to form the ocean's beach, but among the wheels of a watch it creates confusion.

Does this not do away with education in its accepted sense? Every one his own teacher, would not a community become a sad jumble of discordant ignorance? Yes and no; if such was the result;

but if teaching was more the presentation of facts and the scholar invited to interpret them from his own point of view, might not a better education be the result? Teachers are apt to be too free with their own individualities and assume that facts as seen by them only are seen aright. I recall distinctly one of my own teachers who daily interpreted much more than that of which he was professor. No one dared contradict, and it was with some trepidation that questions were asked; yet I knew that what the man said was absurd—nonsense from my point of view then and it has been so ever since. If what this teacher said were true, I should hope never to face what we know as nature; this man making it but a trifle from a Heavenly workshop: As such, from my point of view, it would be utterly distasteful, stupid, flat and insipid to the last degree. That all we see is the result of law, which is from all time and for all time, makes every phase of nature absorbingly entertaining and better still, we feel our own importance as a part of it.

I do not propose to force my point of view upon others, nor so much urge its excellence as to distort another's vision, however feebly, nor should another

#### MY POINT OF VIEW

hold himself so far his brother's keeper as to seek to influence me. More valuable knowledge than some are willing to admit is gathered from experience and many a scholar has acknowledged that his days of appreciation of facts commenced with his freedom from pedagogic tyranny.

Facts are tangible conditions admitting of no dispute and are not confined to this globe alone. There are many astronomical ones and here, it were a pity, the human mind could not have been content. Disputation gathers around many a fact, which is soon lost sight of, and the argumentation becomes so like unto a fact to the disputant, that he cannot realize he is beating the air. Not content to wait until the future reveals itself, men almost universally forecast it with such enthusiasm that interest in the present is lost and much of the goodness of this world is not brought at all within their point of view. To know this world perfectly is enough for any one to know. "One world at a time," but as we travel along our several ways we find, or so they seem from my point of view, vast numbers who like Thoreau's wood-chopper have been so educated as to ensure their remaining children intellectually,

and this is that phase of teaching that to me is horrible. Those problems that are beyond the child's point of view, but sooner or later come within its scope, are anticipated by teachers in such strange ways, that the world becomes almost chaotic as the influence upon one's mind clashes with the mind's impression of an unquestionable fact. I was told, when five years old, that the world was created in six days, and at fifteen it was evident that the world had slowly grown to a habitable condition, and had not been "made" at all. I was forced then to both learn and un-learn; and so, too, with many another statement that had the tendency to distort my mental vision or actually succeeded in so doing and so in later years produced distrust of my own point of view and power of ratiocination. This foul injustice has been going on for centuries, yet but a beggarly few give entire adhesion to all that is wrongfully taught them even when from their own point of view the word of a teacher is the most influencing fact of their lives.

Infancy is drugged by prejudice, bigotry and ignorance, but the vigor of nature overcomes the pernicious influence to a greater or less extent and

#### MY POINT OF VIEW

the world is seen from that point of view which nature intended the individual to have; but may it not be that the penetrative power of our vision is lessened, even if we see clearly to the extent of power remaining? There certainly can be no question that vast numbers see the world differently from what they admit, yet not so clearly as to induce their putting by the sham that cloaks their lives. Confidence in their own strength was too far impaired in infancy, and such die the cowards they are made; not cowards born.

Who can deny that abundant truth for all purposes is common to the world at large, but a few overbearing individuals, scattered over the earth at the rate of one to ten thousand, to further selfish ends and satisfy the overweening demand for supremacy, persuade the nine hundred and ninety-nine that the plain proposition that two and two make four is not quite correct. Confidence in our precious fallible selves is undermined and doubt rules at last where convincement should hold sway; servile acquiescence at last results, and he whom nature intended should be free becomes a slave.

I would that I had been taught only to teach myself; then, at least, I would have been satisfied with what I have learned. As it is, I am suspicious of every fact. Better my geese are all swans than not genuine geese. So often I have not the real thing but some variation thereof. The true thing is that just beyond the bounds of my rambles. A life-time must be spent in acquiring the art of precise discrimination. It is always sub-species So-and-so of species Thus-and-so. Bother the professors! There is a song-sparrow in the gooseberry hedge now, and its song is real music-no, not music, for its song is not according to the laws of harmony, but merely a pleasant sound! Why worry over such niceties of knowledge? Be a law unto yourself, and let it be music in your own estimation. So doing you get the satisfaction of exercising your own self; your life is worth living. You are yourself actually, not the distorted image of some one else.

We read too much. The brain is converted into a sponge, absorbing everything, and, never squeezed by ambition, gives out nothing. Is it acquiring knowledge to merely know what others have said,

#### MY POINT OF VIEW

making no use of

precept.

the knowledge to aid in mental effort purely your own? A great author makes a statement, but where is your own reasoning power, that you have never proved it? There have been individuals brave enough to challenge greatness and prove it incorrect. Who is to know his strength, unless put to the test? The books that please weigh down our shelves, but who can "Read of the Dismal name twenty that have spurred them to real Swamp with its lonely owl. . . activity and made their individuality stand out the topmost blossom on the tree, and their outlook, point of view, of commanding importance? Of commanding importance to themselves only, but that matters not. If we shape ourselves with symmetry, the beauty of life will attract others, but such an aim is not necessary. Our life should be the goal of our ambition, and we can prove useful to others always more by example than by

Thoreau has remarked, the real whortleberry never reaches the market. The bloom, freshness and aroma are all gone. It is equally true of many a fact. The nature that is found on a printed page is well enough in its way, but how ill it fares when compared with the thing itself. Read of the Dismal Swamp with its lonely owl, and then spend a night in it; the former is far the more dismal of the two; that is, from my point of view, and it can matter nothing what others think. Suppose I am deterred by another's views; I am simply deprived of a valued experience. This is why I say we read too much. We drown our ego in an ocean of leaves; are crushed by the weight of our libraries. We crawl behind our books, perhaps timidly peep over them, but never mount the whole pile and extend, by so doing, our point of view. We creep into our libraries, like a hermit into his cave, making it a permanent abode, instead of the most temporary of shelters, wherein refreshed we start with renewed vigor out into the wide world again.

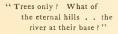
We are told in a notable poem, "This is the forest primeval;" but there is no smell of the woods in the mere words. A vague impression of

## MY POINT OF VIEW

big trees should not satisfy us, yet we may be told that this is all, and so be defrauded; our real self passing through the world a stranger to its splendor. This the more likely, too, because to doubt an older person's dictum is a rank offense. The chances are, as now educated, we will rely too little upon our own strength; depend too much upon the (mis-) guiding arms of others.

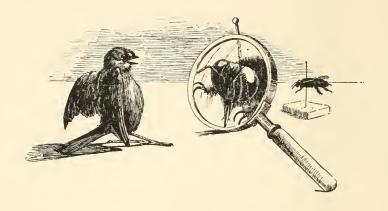
The forest primeval! Trees only? What of the eternal hills upon which they stand; the river at their base? While yet a milk-white mist rested in the valley, and my companion still slept, I stole quietly from the tent and stood upon a bare, flat rock by the water's edge. I could hear the steady lapping of the waves as they met the many obstacles in their course, but it was as sound from chaos only. Then slowly, one by one, the many features of a noble forest came in view. Nature, as it were, was marshalling her host, and trees, rocks, river, hills and sky made up the many grandeurs of the landscape. Birds began to sing, the fishes leapt into sunlight, a butterfly shook the mantling dews from its folded wings and flitted by. Not chaos now, but earth completed. This is the forest primeval.

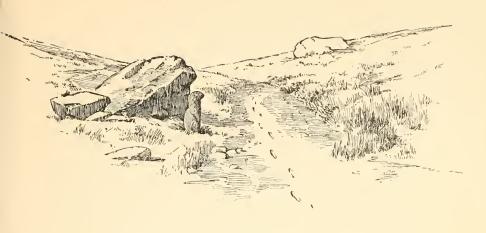
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Wherein I daily wander there yet remains traces of the untamed earth. Its age and origin, as laid down by others, has not much concerned me. That is matter for hours spent in the library. As interpreted by my own consciousness, as seen from my own point of view, I have been entertained. How far that fact may influence others, others must decide.





Views Afoot.

BAYARD TAYLOR would not have seen so much nor told of it so well had he been on horseback, staring from a stage-coach, or being transported in some bicyclic way. As I look upon literature—which signifies nothing, save to myself—he never wrote a better book than "Views Afoot," and this happy title has been in my mind for many a day—ever since I have gotten the chill of winter from my bones and been daily out-of-doors.

I would not be understood as maintaining that we cannot use our eyes and ears to advantage except when walking, or, to speak even more exactly,

when standing still; but if acquisition of knowledge rather than mere transportation is desired, then it is far preferable to go afoot than to ride to any place, or, indeed, to any object. This is peculiarly true of every small town that I have been in, and equally so of every very marked locality in the country, or its peculiar attraction, in the minds of the inhabitants, to which the stranger is always duly conducted, and sometimes with such officious ceremony that all pleasure is lost. We do not see all that should be seen when the approaches are overlooked, and we generally fail to realize the full significance of our whereabouts because required knowledge of the surroundings is wanting. There is almost no independence of objects, but more or less interrelation, and usually more than less.

One great cause of general misunderstanding of what we see is that we fix our vision to the hub of the wheel, have too indefinite an idea of the radiating spokes, and never dream of the existence of an environing rim. The journey from center to circumference must be taken; it is the imperative demand of wisdom.

In the good but not always erudite days of our

grandfathers, as now, huge bowlders were lying in many a field, often far from any mother-rock. There was general wondering how they came to be there, and the conclusion was reached that they had grown on the spot, just as the tree near by had grown; only with this difference, as I once heard it expressed, "it was longer ago, when the world was gettin' into proper shape for farmin'." I myself have been told something like this more than once, as I was told a great deal that was equally absurd derived from Oriental myths. Occasionally a village schoolmaster would express the opinion that bowlders were due to the deluge, and then pose as the exponent of profound learning, vast and deep as the flood itself that circled about Ararat. Would that some novelist could have seen his look of happiness complete when the women of the sewingsociety called him "Professor." I do not dare repeat the substance of a talk about fossils before the pupils of the school I attended. It was forty years ago, to be sure, but even then the truth was not generally unknown. I will only go so far as to say that fossils were asserted to have been "created just as they are now found." Why, I must decline

to add. There is a limit to credulity nowadays, and no one could to-day believe there were such fools as I refer to even forty years ago. Perhaps more strange than all this is the indisputable fact that more than one scholar of that day, matured men now, should remember what the schoolmaster said and have no other view than the silliness of the Dark Ages then doled out to him. There seems to be but one thing equally widespread with ignorance of nature, and that is indifference to her.

No one hurrying by, whatever the means of conveyance, could ever have solved the problem of a bowlder's presence or even distinguished it from an outcropping of rock in place. Attempts of this kind were often made in years gone by, and scientific journals of early date were filled with rubbish; but if a real view is desired, if the details are to be considered and a problem solved, then we must go afoot, and this means a great deal more than merely walking. We must not only see, but hear, taste, touch, and smell as we progress; in brief, acquire all possible knowledge of every interpretable condition, and so be prepared for the final effort through this preliminary training of gradual and all-inclusive realization.

Let us go back to the bowlder lying in the field. It may be a frost-fractured fragment tumbled from a near-by hill, or it may have come from a mountain range hundreds of miles away. It may be angular or oval, rough or smooth, perhaps deeply scarred if it ever was subjected to the grinding action of ice and sand moving slowly over it. Though so long exposed to the round of the seasons in its present home, to frost and sunshine, there will yet be centuries required to efface the decipherable history its surface bears; but, except by a close view and patient study, you cannot tell your neighbor the true story of that stone.

A moment's rational reflection will show how impossible it is to see in a mass of rock, anything but a mass of rock, if you see it only and not the surroundings. We speak carelessly of seeing an object in a "comprehensive" way if we see it in its entirety; but comprehensive of what? Shape and dimension go but a little way in such a matter. It means everything to know what are the bowlder's associations, even to the dust that has gathered about; and above all to recognize the general geological character of the region and distinguish

37

"Let us go back to the bowlder lying in the field."



between wind-blown sand and that brought hither by water, between discoloration of soil by recent rains and vegetal decomposition and deposits of muddy water when the glacial overflow was murky and thick with washings from a distant clay-bank. It is not child's play; but many we meet look upon the world as a toy, and give it no more serious consideration. When we go afield properly equipped, the Ice Age becomes something more than a mere jumble of phrases falling from the professor's lips in tumultuous disarray.

Many a mind is clearly too primitive in its development to grasp even the simplest of natural phenomena; but others are equal to far greater things than they promise to accomplish, and such are likely to remain in ignorance so long as they make no effort to seek the objects that go to make up the sum total of field and forest.

Bird's-eye views are pretty, but there they too frequently end. They are all too apt to be neither meat nor drink, and the mind will soon starve that receives nothing more nourishing. Of course, we can hear of the suggestiveness of great comprehensive wholes and the mind's grasp upon them,

and of grand generalizations that come from contemplative observation of a wide area. Our lang-

uage is too accommodating in the matter of high-sounding phrases. The chances are that when you hear something like this, you can set the speaker down as more full of words than wisdom. It is more than likely that he has not been interviewing the component parts of this comprehensive whole, and so is of necessity an ignoramus. We have too many such, to whom the world listens as if they were little gods. Then again we may be met with the objection that to enter into details is tiresome, which is simply an effort to conceal ignorance. But if so, it is never so tiresome as are the chatterboxes that talk in this way, did they but know it; and why, pray, should not kindness be sufficiently severe to tell them so?

No natural object can be ugly, repulsive, unin-.. is not always ugly." structive, or unentertaining if we see it as it is, and have knowledge of its place and purpose. It may lack what artists call the elements of grace; its colors may be dingy; but then how soon we tire of



too pronounced brilliancy. The ugliest weed, on the other hand, is not always ugly. Think of the brilliant beetle or gay butterfly that may rest upon it. A turtle rooting in the mud of a ditch, itself the color of the soiled water that surrounds it, is so beautifully adapted to its home and habits that we forget the lack of pleasing color and are impressed with the more suggestive beauty of adaptation. We must center a thought upon the object before us,—a serious, prolonged, truth-desiring thought,—and there and then only will the symmetry of nature's handiwork become apparent. Such recognition on our part repays us as fully as floods of color delight the unthinking eye.

How much we lose when time has not been allowed for particulars can readily be seen by the initiated when a visitor, returning home, can affirm only that he saw trees, perhaps adding that some were deciduous and others evergreen, but beyond this nothing. Can more empty phrases be imagined? I know that trees grow in many a country that I have never seen. It needs no traveller therefrom to supply that information. That man has never really seen a tree who has not sat in its

shade, reclined in its branches, and been a visitor thereto many times and in every season. Trees improve upon acquaintance, like a few of the people we meet, and we are never deceived by them.

A distant view of a tree-top may add much to a landscape; but this would tell nothing of the story of a curious old maple near by, with a trunk so marvelously out of shape that we can only speculate as to what troubles of growth the tree has experienced. There stands amidfields a scarlet oak whose very presence is a benediction. The most hurried traveler who stops a moment in its shade carries that tree's image in his heart for many a day.

I know nothing of church architecture, but my three beeches with their hundred uplifted branches are encompassed in a dim light that is impressive, solemn, and soothing to the soul. Perhaps you may say it is not a religious light. This is a point that I would not argue if I could; but it is a light that leads to thankfulness that such trees as these may still be found. Here forever do I find a hushed if not holy calm; a source of delight so satisfying that my soul has no other craving. These beeches are a marked feature of the landscape, and visible from

every point; but how few have ever seen them! Many think of Nature as all out-of-doors, as everywhere open, exposed to every breeze; they fancy that where sunbeams cannot enter, only empty shadows lurk; but Nature, which you so sadly misunderstand, has many a sanctuary that is not open to every one who draws near, and inner sanctuaries for the favored few. None are denied except for good cause, however their unpreparedness. No one can hide his indifference of Nature from her, and she wisely welcomes no bungling intruder to her inner courts.

My friend pleads, "My time for outings is too limited for doing more than getting a breath of fresh air;" as if the air would be less fresh if he ".. Nature, .. has carried an extra mite of knowledge back to town with him. Is the freshness of the atmosphere in proportion to the breather's rapid transit? "And I can learn about nature from books," he adds. True, he can; and he can also confirm his ignorance by the reading of books. Not all knowledge is gathered between their covers, and all that is came from the out-door world, gathered by observing men and women. It is well to go where the writers

many a sanctuary that is not open to every one . . "

of books have been, or to localities as closely akin to these as possible, and bring back with you as many facts as you can carry, but never to be overloaded therewith and so become dismayed by their bewildering array. Then you are better fitted to read understandingly; and it is not so simple a matter as you might suppose to sit down and intelligently compare that which you have seen with the statements made by others. Perhaps your impressions and those of the author will not agree. So much the better; no greater a blessing can await you. Now, go again and see if you observed correctly the first time, and if you are satisfied that you did, trace out the probable cause of your conclusion differing from the statements in the book you have been reading. Do not for one moment be influenced by such an unfortunate impression, if you have ever held it, as that a statement is necessarily correct because in print. Bear in mind that great men often make little mistakes, just as little men make great blunders; and sometimes it has happened just the other way, and the dwarf has got the better of the giant. No really great man ever blindly followed his teachers, or he could never

have become great. Ascribe infallibility to the professor, and you become at best but his echo, and condemn to slavery what should be free as the air, your own mind.

Some I have known plead that the study of nature would prove a task, and that it is recreation they seek when out-of-doors,—spinning, probably at reckless speed, adown some public path. Returned to their homes, are not tired legs quite as objectionable and less noble than a weary brain? But what these people claim is not true. The occupied

brain would not be wearied. Nature-study is never a task, but a tonic. It re-creates. We are renewed whenever a new fact swims into our ken. To turn from the columns of a ledger or the pandemonium of the stock exchange to the wing of a moth or the song of a sparrow in the way-side hedge is more healthfully restful than miles upon miles of mere locomotion. We do not become acquainted with people and make new friends by merely passing them in the street; and we can pass by Nature all our days

and never have even a speaking

44

bullfrog in the

acquaintance. If you wish for this or more, you must go to her afoot and, begging to be introduced, make your obeisance, and express your pleasure for the privilege. Such as do this are never turned away, nor, I venture to say, has any one who has done this ever regretted the step. As a little salt makes our food more palatable,—" brings out the flavor," as the cook says,—so a knowledge of nature brings out the best that is in man and cures him of insipidity.

This cannot be disputed. It is as evident as that, everywhere we go, we meet with most insipid men and women, creatures that know their fellow-creatures only, which is not, as they seem to think, to know all that is worth knowing of the world in which they live. Man may be the most important part of the world, but the rest of it is not of so little importance that to be ignorant thereof carries no stigma. Better by far the croaking bullfrog in the marsh than the wordy ignoramus of the town. The noise in the former case means something; but can we always show value in the latter instance? Even civilization can run to extremes, and men become denaturalized so thoroughly that it would

puzzle the old-time species-making naturalist to determine their place in the scale of creation. Questions that I have been asked and assertions that I have heard made in perfectly good faith are so astonishingly absurd that to put them in print would only result in charging me with gross exaggeration; and these, too, from men and women who, as the world goes, are accounted accomplished. Some country clubs are at best but a means of airing the city and freshening it for another campaign in the stuffy atmosphere of a ball-room or parlor. How seldom does a trace of the country, other than this, go to the city! It is enough to find that a tree gives shade, but that one tree differs from another is never discovered. "Oak," "beech," "birch," and "walnut" stand for the colors of furniture; words no fuller of meaning than trademarks, the shibboleth of shopkeepers.

"But if we are happy in our ignorance of nature," pipes a pretty miss, "what business is it of yours? Who set you up as my teacher? I graduated with credit to myself, so my friends say, and don't feel the worse for having hoodwinked the professor of botany, cheated a little in chemistry, and given

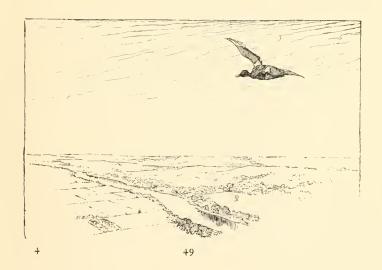
zoölogy the go-by. Now, let me see; my roses come from the florist, and that's all the botany I require; the cook handles the baking-powder, so I've no need of chemistry, and "—here she reddens a little—"I've a serpent ring with ruby eyes, and there's a jolly bird on my spring hat, and that's all I want to know of natural history. Your preaching is all lost on me, and I guess on everybody else."

No one likes to get a blow between the eves, and when this pert minikin gave me such a one, I was staggered for a moment; but now that her back is turned, I will continue. It is pleasant to talk, even to empty benches. It was doubtless great fun to hoodwink the professor of botany when a schoolgirl, and to cheat at chemistry; but when under the doctor's care because of handling poison ivy, or ill from reckless use of complexion powders, or even when annoyed beyond endurance because of the flat failure of her boasted sponge-cake—then visions of the patient teachers will come up, as they ought to. And how these spectral professors will grin triumphantly at this same school-miss, now woman grown, in her distress! She is having, thanks to her ignorance, in which she glories still, a practical

interpretation of the text, Virtue is its own reward, and vice its own punishment. True mental health is that which welcomes natural knowledge and has an unfailing appetite for facts.

How are we to recognize facts as such, and how, when one is acquired, are we to draw from it its full significance? It is difficult to reply; but the question brings us back to the starting-point, and emphasizes the importance of a close view, a view afoot, of every aspect of nature. Adopting such a method, we diminish the chances of being misled, and are oftener warranted in saying positively, "I know," instead of "I think." We are obviously nearer the solution of its meaning the nearer we can get to the place or object; while the more facts that we encounter, face to face, the clearer at last becomes their interrelation and our appreciation of the meaning of the world as a whole. A fact by itself is not only stubborn but often impenetrable. Isolated, it is no more comprehensible than the gibbering of apes to civilized man; but holding to it, while we gather others, we find in due time how they fit, one to the other, and it is not long before the detached pieces are united to form an elaborate

whole. Whether through life the world remains as a dissected map, the fragments scattered in hopeless confusion, or becomes an intelligent chart, depends upon ourselves; and we can rest assured that the view afoot and not the bird's-eye view is necessary to make us as wise as we should desire to be. Nature, be it ever remembered, stands aloof, can frown with as great facility as she can smile if so disposed, and withholds her abundant treasure with untiring zeal; but man can prove his superiority if he so elects, and draw a goodly portion of it from her. Is it not a worthy effort? Is it not a golden prize?





the sunny pasture, that even now, in early February, could boast of a dandelion, and faced the North Star. I did not start with the purpose of going so far as that; but what of an absurdly small fraction of that immeasurable distance? If the mysteries of the most commonplace mile are beyond a man's lifetime to unfold, what of infinity? I speak now not only of myself, but of others, with whom I have compared impressions: why do we so

#### FACING THE NORTH STAR

seldom take a northern direction when out for a walk? Why does the North seem to count for so little and figure so insignificantly, and that little prejudicially, in folklore? The best people in the world came out of the north, and the longer mankind has been away from boreal regions, in such proportion has it degenerated. The tropics can cry out in indignation and fill the world with contradictions; the truth remains. As surely as a man's brain is in his head, so surely human progress cometh from the north.

It is true, man originated where a warm climate prevailed, but it was then a physical rather than mental development, and his body prevailed over his intellect, until he was forced to face the North Star, and be put to his wits' ends to meet the new conditions. Frost stimulated the brain to some worthy purpose, and kept it at work until its best fruit matured—our present civilization—a goodly fruit, but not without a blemish, and the perfecting process is still under way. Of course to this, as to all other general statements, abundant exceptions will be taken. There are people in this world who seem to have nothing else to do—professional

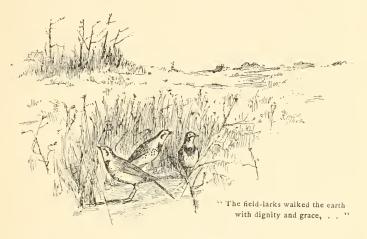
objectors, delighting in the noise they make. The clack and clamor of theorists is the world's most dismal din.

But, to plunge headlong from the general to the particular, from men as nations to one man as a rambler, why is it that he looks lovingly towards the south, and greets with a smile and has his countenance lighted by expectancy when facing either the east or west? If we could view the whole world from some point in distant space, how surely would we associate the north with cold and death, and the south with warmth and life, and rightly; but man is never beyond being contradictory, and so, moved by the hunting instincthappy survival of prehistoric time-I doggedly faced the North Star, and looked not only for animal life, but vegetal signs of spring, through a dreary February day, nor proved a fool for my pains. Such were to be seen, but not in the abundance I was sure of had I faced in any other direction. I felt as if walking was a serious business; and so far as it is, it is utterly distasteful. I have a horror of important undertakings. To walk in a given direction because it is a predeter-

### FACING THE NORTH STAR

mined direction becomes mere mechanical progress.

But why is this northward course unfruitful? Is it really so? I stopped under a colonial chestnuttree, standing amidfields, and gravely considered the matter; but not for long. Common-sense came to my rescue—something she is not given to doing



—and I saw the absurdity of the whole thing. I remembered my friend who lives ten miles north of me, and he finds abundance where I can only meagerly gather. My north-land is his south-land. If on his way to visit me he finds much, then what is it blinds me facing in the opposite direction? Forewarned by the facts, I was not forearmed. I

hunted diligently, but to little purpose, and gave up in despair when but two miles from home. A flock of merry field-larks in a worn-out pasture, a flock of robins in a bordering wood, and pinefinches beyond number in clumps of withered weeds—these held me; and when birds are abundant, cares drag less heavily. Those that I now saw proved an artistic combination, but where is the artist to prove this to the reader? It does make a difference how, when, and where you see a bird; for different species may be so associated as to destroy each other's merits. It was not so to-day. The field-larks walked the earth with dignity and grace, and called for consideration that has seldom been given them. Birds of the air are known to everybody, but not so birds of the ground, and yet there are many of them. One reason for this may be that they are not so readily seen; but I saw a half-hundred at once, and their walking, running, skulking, alike brightened a few square rods of frost-bitten ground, and made it smile as if again Flora reigned supreme.

Think of larks as winter blossoms, and the fact that you are facing the North Star will be quite for-

### FACING THE NORTH STAR

gotten. But these larks were not the one redeem-

ing feature; the tall weeds trembled as a host of twittering finches bore down upon them, and the whole surface of the field before me seemed to tremble. There was not the slightest trace of wind, and the swaving of the withered weeds and gaunt gray stems of the past summer's growth was communicated to the earth and air. I felt the gentle motion in myself and never was more in touch with surrounding conditions. The air was full of simple music, yet not a note but came straight from the heart of a happy bird. I felt the same ecstatic thrill that moved them to their abundant happiness, and I wondered if, after all, had I wandered away from the bleak North instead of towards it, I would have found more pleasure. Certainly it was worth a long journey to be here at this moment. flush timid larks from weedy fields is of itself a joy; to do this to the music of abundant finches makes the day memorable. Then, too, there were robins in the near-by trees. They hinted of spring that will come so soon now, and at times -

they chirped so shrilly it seemed as if they were chiding the timid season for loitering by the way. Robins, larks, and finches—yes, it was a happy combination, an artistic grouping, brightening the landscape as only birds and sunshine can.

If such, then, were the attractions held out to those facing the North Star, I wondered why the rambler did not continue to do so till the crack o' doom. But while I tarried in a stranger's field I looked everywhere about me, and in time, having scrutinized the east and west, I found myself gazing intently southward. The glowing sky, the inviting sunshine, the penetrating brightness that drove all shadows from my path, again wielded the spell that has so long bound me, and forthwith, without ceremonious leave-taking, I turned my back upon the north. I had now but to retrace my steps, yet the world was very different. It was as if spring was waiting for me and I was hurrying to her side. I venture to put it stronger, so great is the difference—to face the sun is to walk from chaos to cosmos, from uncertainty to certainty, from desolation to a garden-spot-almost from death to life. When we withdraw from the activities of the

# FACING THE NORTH STAR

outdoor world, and all unmoved by fancy's whims calmly contemplate the world as it is, we know that this is all untrue, but few are the ramblers who can rid themselves of the strange impressions.

My eyes were not more widely open on my return, but I felt that vision was different. Going northward I was despondent, yet without knowing why; and now, going southward, I am expectant. This means much; perhaps means everything; for he who expects nothing will surely pass by nature's treasures and heed them not. This happy state of expectancy is closely akin to faith, and owes its existing to facing the sunshine. At least, I have no other explanation to offer. When we compare these phrases—facing the North Star, and facing the sunshine—at once the world is pictured in halves, and as distinctly different as black and white. How can the world be otherwise than gloomy where the sun does not go? How otherwise than brilliant along its pathway? As true this as that we have in ourselves a north and south, a shady and sunny side.

Winter lingered at the foot of every tree and fence-post that I came to, but upon its north side







only. Peeping around the corner, I found the sunshine cozily nestled there, and it had coaxed a summer greenness into every blade of grass. If not grass, it was moss, and as fresh in color; and insect life had responded to the reviving warmth that centered in these little southern outlooks. Spiders were alert, and small flies, and one red and black beetle that buzzed and hummed as loudly as bees among flowers. All this I saw, and yet not a step distant was cold and lifeless winter.

What next? I asked,—but with no such feeling as that of the tadpole when its tail dropped off. Novelty could only be the more entertaining, and no painful incident seemed possible. Mice and moles were both astir, yet, curiously enough, I had thought of neither on my northward journey. The ridged earth where the mole had traveled was frosted on its north and crumbling on its southern, sunny side. The animal's recent journey among the grass roots showed that earthworms were also near the sur-The ridged earth where the mole had traveled . .

#### FACING THE NORTH STAR

face. Expecting a rich harvest in the cavernous hollow of a patriarchal oak, I approached it with extreme caution, and peeping around the corner, saw, to my delight, a wild mouse hunting for some stray edible bit in the shelly debris of a squirrel's hoard of nuts. Believing no danger to be near, it was not ill at ease, and every movement was graceful and, what is better, purposeful. The mouse was in search of food, and deliberately turned over many an empty shell to see if anything might be lying beneath it. There was nothing mechanical about the creature; no movement was repeated in precisely the same manner. The mouse did not go to and fro with the regularity of a pendulum or as its own heart was beating; and yet learned doctors of comparative psychology give us the impression that mind, such as our own, does not enter into the ordinary day's doings of creatures like mice. I believe that it does. The mouse before me was evidently swayed by external impressions, and its occasional hesitation indicated the power of choice. The irregularity, even in so simple a matter as searching for food, was not a mere mechanical activity of muscles influenced

through the brain by an empty stomach. Hunger was doubtless the impelling motive, but to meet that demand intelligence was brought into play. In this creature's little brain there ran a train of thought, if actions speak, and I would have more to tell but that my eagerness overcame discretion, and changing my position that I might see even more distinctly, I trod too heavily upon a brittle twig. There was a snapping sound, followed by a sudden assumption of a listening attitude on the part of the mouse, a shrill squeak, and a lightning-like disappearance.



My own fault, as usual; and here let me urge the rambler to be content with a fair measure of success, and avoid too great eagerness to improve the opportunity. The whole world is thick with fools who have lost all because of their insane desire to better their conditions. Early in life we reach our proper level, and he is blessed who has no ambition to soar above it.

In vain I tried to find where my little mouse had gone. There was no hole visible down which it could have darted; but failing in this, I did find how warm and summerlike a spot is the hollow of

#### FACING THE NORTH STAR

an old oak on the south side of the tree. Were it somewhat larger, I could have lived there quite contentedly. And what an outlook! Everywhere before me there was a glow that meant life, a trembling of the atmosphere as if the very air was unembodied life itself; and thinking this, I turned about, and how strangely empty, forsaken, desolate, and almost chaotic the northern sky and all beneath it!

It must not be inferred that wild life in winter persistently shuns the northern outlook of its surroundings, or is incapable of withstanding its more vigorous conditions. Many a bird will fly straight away from the sun, going many a mile due northward, and not a brave tree-creeper, woodpecker, or nuthatch but peers as closely into the bark of a tree's north side as where the sun shines cheerfully upon it, but there is a closer clinging to the tree's trunk, and livelier motion. I am sure I have seen birds deliberately sun themselves when the day was very cold, but clear, and squirrels find the crusted snow-banks as attractive a highway as where the ground is bare. It is not so much a matter of endurance as of preference. This is shown by

approaching a barn in the country on its north side. You may find some creeping or winged creature upon or near the building, and are pretty sure to do so, when you turn the corner and look up and down the sunlit wall. Exceptions are always to be found in bewildering confusion, but the rule is an excess of life in sunshine and far less of it in the shade. This is the condition of an ordinary winter day, but does not apply to the permanent homes of animals. I have often been surprised at gray squirrels taking up their abode in the most exposed positions, as in a tree standing in the middle of a field, and even then with the entrance to the nest on the north side; and the white-footed mouse sometimes refits a bird's nest, for a winter home, in a position exposed to the north winds, when within a rod or two as good a nest was available in a much more sheltered locality. This may be evidence of lack of wit, but it is well to remember that the point of view of a mouse and our own are not the same. Mice, like men, may have more than temperature to consider when locating a home.

There are occasional winter days when all points of the compass are as one; when we shiver in the

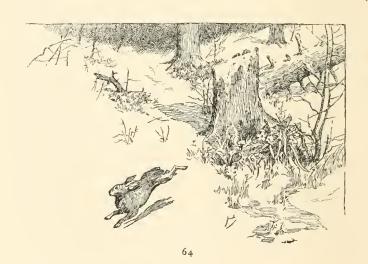
# FACING THE NORTH STAR

sun as well as in the shade. Then, thinking it over in a warm library, the conclusion might be reached, from what I have written, that the woods and fields were apparently deserted, that every living thing had sought a snug shelter and waited for less vigorous weather. Not at all. Exercise is now the order of the day, and many an open field is as thickly thronged as the grounds of a county fair. If there be snow, horned larks will be tripping over it, and every hedge-row will tremble with the congregated sparrows. The chirping of the host will swell to the dignity of exultant song.

Homeward bound, I had birds to keep me company at every turn; not a few crows or sparrows merely, but royal songsters in the shrubbery, hawks overhead, and herons in the weedy margin of a little swamp, and from the base of an old stump, where dandelions and spring beauty flourished with May-day luxuriance, rushed a gray rabbit at top-speed, a veritable "mad March hare." It is an empty day when a dozen species of birds cannot be seen, and oftener I nave doubled and trebled the number. Not one of those I saw to-day but was associated with sunshine, and when flushed flew

southward. Was it mere coincidence, or did it bear some slight significance? They all seemed of my mind in the matter, but whether we were all fools or mildly philosophical, who shall say?

My impressions continued even to my door-step. Nor was it strange. On the north side of the house there was still a remnant of a snow-drift, and the grass about it as brown as newly upturned soil; on the south side, daffodils in bud, grass green, and a dandelion glowing with the freshness of youth, bright in southern sunshine as ever glittered the North Star in a blue-black wintry sky.





NINE SPRING CORNER! There is a good deal in a name in this instance. Where the bluff bends almost at right angles, there is a nook as cozy as if planned by some nature-lover for his favorite retreat, and just in front of the spot, extending southward, there is an evergreen marsh. Nine springs flow steadily upward, tossing silvery sand about, and then the united waters spreading outwards are lost, at last, in the current of the creek hard by. These springs

are warm; a trifle warmer than others not far away, and keep winter at arm's length. They are an ever-watchful guard that permit no trespassing by frost; and here, with the sheltering bluff to keep away all chilly winds, I have spent many a rampant, roaring day, all unmindful that the bleakness of the Arctic circle swept the upland fields.

It is one of the pleasant features of an outing, that if we celebrate the anniversary of some memorable day, we are not likely to find natural history repeating itself, as other history is said to do. There will be surely some changes and surprises sufficient to make us realize that the full significance of a locality is only gradually acquired. However severe the winter, there is always the freshness of spring, if not of the matured summer, at Nine Spring Corner; but it is not always the same freshness. Of the abundant plant life, there is not, year after year, the same relative proportion of the different species, but now one and now another is in excess.

I sought the aid of a botanist and he wrote me, as the results of visits made year after year, that here we have "several varieties of algae of different

#### NINE SPRING CORNER

shades of green; spike-rush, horn-wort, waterstarwort, myriophyllum, beautiful enough to have a choice, common name, but this has not as yet been chosen; anacharis, hypnum of several species and of many shades of green, attached to the waterlogged bits of wood; chandelier plant; splatterdock, new shoots of which are to be found during mild winters, framing in the springs' areas with bright golden yellow and light green; and lastly, pond-weed of more than one species." These, bear in mind, are all submerged plants and we must go to the springs and look down into the water to see them. Not all of them the same day, nor more or less of them all in the same season; but such a fair proportion that the idea of cold, lifeless, forbidding conditions will not occur to you. To look, however cold the day, into the waters of Nine Spring Corner is to be refreshed and warmed. You look up to see if a new sun has not appeared in the heavens, or if summer has not anticipated her appointed time and is now peeping over your shoulder.

But this is not all the winter botany of the place. As "partly-submerged species," my friend

mentions golden saxifrage, false loose-strife, skunk cabbage, several grasses, elder, water cress, and cardamine. These he says "are more or less green all winter."

Here, I have often thought was the most likely spot to hear the little crepitating frog, the Acris gryllus, and known more generally as the hylódes; but no early warmth wooes them unto song, though I find them occasionally. This, the smallest of our frog-like animals, has given rise to some strange misconceptions on the part of writers who are sticklers for indefinitely refined specific recognition. I used to call this "peeper" or rattling frog, Acris crepitans, but now it is said in ex cathedra manner, but by not ex cathedra authority, that I have never seen a true "crepitans" but its cousin "gryllus," and Cope, our sole authority, cited as proof of my error and my critic's right position. Unfortunately, there have been found a great many variations from both forms, and these "betwixt and betweenities" give me a deal of solid comfort, for taking Cope's description as a guide, both "crepitans" and "gryllus" can be found. These disputed creatures are the ones that rattle in the shallow waters, early



## NINE SPRING CORNER

in March, making the air tremble, but they do more, they "squeak," "peep" or "whistle," as it has been variously described, and these more or less "fife-like" notes must not be confounded with the shrill, full-volumed note, pitched on a different key, of the little Pickering's hyla or yellow tree-toad. As Cope has stated, "these are chiefly noisy in the end of the afternoon" except in shady nooks; but the Acrides of both varieties rattle and "peep" all day long, and the statement that such an accomplishment is "contrary to nature" is about equal to that of declaring a man cannot both talk and whistle.



Warmth and sunshine and abundant green growths are not always of themselves sufficient to take me out of doors, but the unfailing charm of Nine Spring Corner that draws me draws many a bird, keeps many a growth as fresh as summer, and the waters as full of active life as are ever the sunny shallows of the pond when minnows are at play.

Nine Spring Corner! Multifold as the attractions really are, and fully equal to the name's suggestiveness, my last visit was concerned exclusively with the abundant salamanders that were found.

This form of animal life, common as it is and by no means wholly aquatic, is very little known. Nearly everybody we meet asks what sort of animal we have captured, if you show them a salamander, and will say it is a "water-lizard," which is almost as bad as absolute ignorance. Salamanders are lizard-shaped, but have smooth skins and not scales, as have true lizards. They are either aquatic, semi-aquatic or live on land, but not where there is an absence of moisture. The hot, dry sands on which lizards delight to bask would shrivel up the most terrestrial salamander that we have. They are of many colors, red, yellow, blue, brown and black. They are striped, spotted, marbled and mottled; quick of movement, always alert and perfectly harmless. Their kinship is with frogs and by naturalists they are known as "batrachians."

After much disturbance of the weedy growths that filled the largest spring basin, I made a successful haul and caught two of these creatures. They were rose-pink in color, with many black dots, as if sparsely dusted with pepper. The color was as bright as that of the present two-cent postage stamp, and almost the same. I caged them securely

# NINE SPRING CORNER

and fished for more, but caught only one of another species, the two-lined salamander, a smaller and more slender form and not so pretty. They were all very much alive and so must have been finding an abundance of food. The sluggishness incident to semi-torpidity or of disturbed hibernation was lacking. I could see no difference between them now, in February, and last summer, when the thermometer went to a hundred at noon. Professor Cope has recorded of my rose-pink beauties: "They are especially aquatic in their habits and are found on the ground only after rains. They are not unfrequently found under the bark of fallen trees in damp situations, but their chief haunts are cold springs. Here, beneath stones, they may be always found, occupying, if possible, the fissure from which the limpid water rises and displaying their beautiful hues through the transparent medium with the brilliancy of a strange exotic rather than the pallor of a dweller in the chilly depths and dark recesses of a cave. walk deliberately and swim with some activity, moving, as do other salamanders, with the limbs pressed to the sides and the body and tail undulat-

ing laterally. Their movements are not so active as those of some other species. Their food consists of insects."

This is the rosy salamander of mountain springs and caves and rapid brooks, but not one of these features is at Nine Spring Corner. For rocks they have to content themselves with weeds, and it is only at long intervals you have a glimpse of them, unless the vegetation in which they hide is violently disturbed. More than once I have pulled out whole handfuls of weeds, and the cunning creature gave no sign of its presence. It might have been paralyzed by fear, but I gave it credit for a good deal of cunning; ever maintaining the exercise of ratiocinative power is the best explanation. It is certainly the easiest. I cannot imagine any animal performing any act without knowing why it does it or not knowing beforehand that it is about to do it. A step or two more in advance of this is not improbable, but we are still a good deal in the dark when we deal with comparative psychology.

My rose-pink salamanders differ in habits from those observed by Professor Cope, in that they do not seem to seek out the coolest retreats. I have

#### NINE SPRING CORNER

found them where the sun was shining so directly that the ground fairly steamed, and not another kind was associated with them, and even the frogs wandered a little to this side or that. Perhaps an abundance of food tempted them, and their stay was to be but temporary. This is the more probable because plunging them into ice-cold water directly from a steamy atmosphere did them no serious injury. I have always thought this was our one salamander with a voice, but (in conversation) Professor Cope said "No." I ought to be convinced, but I am not. He insisted the anatomy of the throat was against such vocal power, but I cannot, even with this against me, think I am mistaken. The movements of the creature's jaws at the time, the slight swelling of the throat, the trembling of the whole body, in fact, was suggestive of an animal uttering a sound, of calling aloud, as if to a far-off companion. Just as we would be sure that a cow was lowing, a horse neighing or dog barking, though we heard no sound, so I assumed this salamander was uttering the "peep" that I heard. Certainly the note itself did not suggest a Pickering's hyla. Still, it is always to be remem-

bered that the sounds we hear may be uttered by other individuals than those we see. I once terribly blundered in this respect with reference to the "booming" of a bittern.

My two-lined salamanders were bright yellow, slender and not more than three inches long. Professor Cope records: "It is to a great extent a water animal, and less frequently found under bark and stones. It is only in shallow, stony brooks that it occurs, however, and cannot be called aquatic in the sense in which the Tritons are. It is very active, and wriggles and runs from the pursuer in the same manner as, and generally in company with, the fuscous salamander." Here, it will be seen, my observations differ, but not contradictorily, really. We must always consider the physical geography of a locality when considering the habits of such animals as we find in it. These little yellow salamanders live exactly as Professor Cope has described in the Pennsylvania hills, but freshets in the Delaware Valley probably brought these to the low-lying flood plain, where there are neither hills nor rocks nor rapid water, and there was but one thing to do, to accommodate themselves to their

## NINE SPRING CORNER

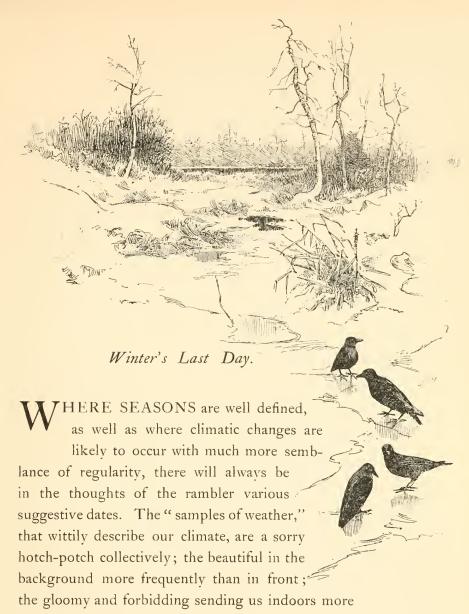
new surroundings; either this or die. Such occurrences go far in explaining the discrepancies between the accounts of habits of animals by different observers. Nine Spring Corner does not tell us all we might wish to know of rosy or yellow salamanders, but does tell us that these creatures can flourish in localities widely different from the homes of the great majority of their kind; and the full significance of this simple fact has scarcely yet been appreciated as it should.

These salamanders were but a tithe of the zoölogic riches of this favored spot, but I ceased from troubling when satisfied as to their identity and replaced them in the weedy waters of Nine Spring Corner. Then came the restful, contemplative hour when the labors of the day are over, and it is yet early to return home.

Never is there, here, a lack of suggestiveness, and if my salamandrine friends had become a little tiresome I could have turned at any moment to the never-absent birds. In the trees that clothe and crown the steep bluff the chickadee was making merry; uttering, just then, its flute-like pee-wee note, the most spring-like of all the songs of winter

birds; but what brought me to my feet, thrilled me and almost urged shouting aloud my joy at being out of doors on such a day, at such a time, was the exultant cry of a hawk that high above the earth defied the approaching storm. It was but a momentary impulse on my part. Not equally brave or rash, I hurried home.





often than the cheerful and inviting induce us to ramble beneath the overarching skies. But the suggestive dates arouse us to a pleasurable degree of curiosity if not of expectancy, and the twenty-eighth of February is one of them—the last day of nominal winter.

To-day (1899) there is abundant sunshine, comparative warmth, flooded and frozen meadows, noisy crows and chattering purple grakles. A crested tit, lost somewhere in the oak tree-tops, and a Carolina wren are whistling merrily. The air is so full of sound, it trembles. Even the hill-foot spring seems to babble in a higher key. The recent storm bid fair to make an angry river, but its threatened mad career was checked in some strange way, and the waters reached but little above their normal level. Happily, though, that little drowned many a broad pasture, and now, on the thin ice, the crows are playing "tickly benders" in a way that makes me envious. I could laugh as loud as any crow could I venture within their pretty paradise.

Flooded and frozen meadows! The climax of happy condition, but frozen and flooded only for the crows. An envious spectator is ever in an ugly

## WINTER'S LAST DAY

frame of mind, but because weighted with excess of flesh the spirit need not stoop to bitterness. There is, or ought to be, much satisfaction in seeing others happy. I would gladly be a crow this morning and outscream all the flock, but I shall not mourn because I cannot. The sunny slope whereon I now stand is a comfortable resting place, and to gain our agreeable outlook is half the purpose of an outdoor day. Associate the sounds that are heard with the time of year, and a pleasing train of thought is sure to follow.

It is the last day of winter, and I fancy every bird is rejoicing over the fact. It is no time now to plague oneself with realism. Fortunately for themselves birds have no almanacs, for they might be as much their slaves as we are. It is the last day of winter and birds are singing. Put the two facts together. Do not see if they will fit, but make them. Thrust incongruities into outer darkness and be happy. The birds are singing, and that is enough. Early last September an octogenarian told me we were to have an early autumn and a long, cold winter and much else he predicted. All has happened as he said. How he knew, he

would not tell, and was not pleased when I called it guess-work. To-day his eyes glittered like those of an angry snake, when he hissed "guessin,' was it?" at me. Probably this was one of the few times when he proved right, but I left the cruelty of saying so unsaid. The happiness of ignorant old men, and few other people are as happy, should be held sacred.

Of all I saw and heard, that which most suggested the coming change to spring's ethereal mildness, was the trickling water that hurried from the mossy clefts in the hillside, as if impatient for the sunshine. Think of sparkling water, long pent up in utter darkness, deep in the earth, now free to ramble in the light of day! Is it any wonder that it laughs? Surely not, so we will laugh together. The crows shall not have all the good things of the passing hour.

Trickling waters, ever singing the same song, are never tiresome. It is the one sound in nature of which we never weary. It is the best of her expressions of cheerfulness, but that fact does not wholly explain why, when listening to hastening waters, we never long for the cheery call of a crested tit or

### WINTER'S LAST DAY

the jubilant whistling of a cardinal grosbeak. I say "never," but, of course, hundreds will contradict. It is the limit of most men's capabilities; but I reassert we are content to listen longer to the babbling brook than to any bird that ever flew above it or paused at its edge to sip the sparkling waters. A reason for our complete content may be that the seasons do not change the song. It is not sung joyously in June and only muttered sullenly in December. Whatever the day, the brightest or gloomiest of the year, the melody is as marked, and surely, to listen to that which no power can change from cheerfulness to despondency, is very near to the climax of good fortune.

The running water heard to-day sang as it did at creation's dawn. Time, that "writes no wrinkle" on the ocean's brow, has not changed a note of the babbling brook's pæan to high glee. This means much. By it we are carried back to days so long gone, we have no clear conception of them. We can think of them as we choose, and even the geologist has little ground for contradiction. The song of flowing water brings us close to nature as she was at her beginning, while the warbling of

6

birds holds us to what nature is to-day. As the sparkling water hurries by, we are led to thought-fulness and serious consideration of many a problem, but live the life of a butterfly in the presence of a singing bird. After all, this may be the more to be desired, philosophers are ever such grimvisaged folk, and philosophy is never a cheerful companion, even when most decorously arrayed in many-syllabled words.

We say the brook "babbles," and this means not talking seriously or singing with a motive, but is not the hint that it gives us, not to take life too seriously, worth something? We would all rather laugh than cry, and work cheerfully performed is a better production, ever, than any result of labor under protest.

But this little brook by which I am now resting does teach another lesson, one in physical geography, which is worthy our attention. Grains of sand, so minute no one can see them singly, are carried by the current from the hillside to the broad plain beyond. By such slow but sure process the upland is being brought to a lower level and the meadow builded up as higher ground. We can sit

## WINTER'S LAST DAY

here all day, and day after day, yet see no change; but what of the long ridge of clean, white sand in the bed of the brook? And if we take a glass and let it slowly fill, we will find a few grains of sand resting on the bottom. Then, take a cubic inch of the black soil of the meadow and wash it until all traces of vegetal matter are removed, and we will have left a little of the same fine sand that we found in the glass when we caught the flowing water from a hill-foot spring.

The water is comparatively warm, however cold the day, and here is steadfastness that means a great deal. It is warmth sufficient for green growths; luxuriant to-day, the last of winter, as one might look for at the end of August. Fishes, too, are working their way far up stream, and the hardiest of them all, the burly mud-minnow, is even now seeking a spawning ground, where in midsummer the land will be hot and almost dry, for these little brooks vary as to their volume, and are often quite lost to view before autumn, yet now they overflow what we may consider their normal bounds.

Their normal bounds, that is, historically speaking; but it is safe to assert that not one of these



insignificant brooks but was once a permanent stream of much greater volume. A careful examination of the adjoining ground will often show this to be true. One deep cross-section I had made of such a little brook beautifully illustrated this, for not only was there a well-marked deposit of discolored earth, mingled with the flotsam of an upland waterway, half-fossilized leaves, bones of fishes and frogs, but more suggestive than all else, by this little creek had stood the wigwam of an Indian family. Here I found the ashes of the one-time hearth, traces of the pottery used and many a broken implement of stone and bone. Such discoveries, common as they are in this neighborhood, never fail to make a deep and pleasing impression. They stimulate the imagination in a healthy way. Every object of Indian origin I gather suggests its original owner. It was peculiarly true of this case. I fancied seeing the sedate old hunter by his fireside, smoking solemnly and communing, without outward sign, with the talisman he carried—perhaps a carved stone tree-toad, I picked up recently—or addressing in this same impassive way, the quaintly carved stone image near his wigwam.

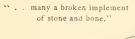


## WINTER'S LAST DAY

But however we may desire to linger in fancy's realm, we are sure to find quick transition to the land of prose, and we realize the saddening fact that the vast change from the day of the Indian to that of ourselves is not altogether a desirable one. We have lost some things worth the having. Well may we regret that the change has been so radical. Better fewer and more wisely cultivated fields and here and there an acreage of forest worthy of the name. We can readily suffer from lack of trees, and a grove of old oaks never wrought us any harm. To worship in Nature's temples is not mere clap-trap.

There is a springtide vigor in the movements of all our fishes now, and the big, brown mud-minnow is equal to leaping up miniature cascades, and finds its way where weaker fishes would never dare to wander. Here, where most people would look for nothing, the story of the lordly salmon and the high cataracts of many a river is told in an humble but not unentertaining way. It is seldom that we find a pretty flower this early in the season, but if color is our object, we will find no more brilliant display than that of many a minnow of the creeks, that

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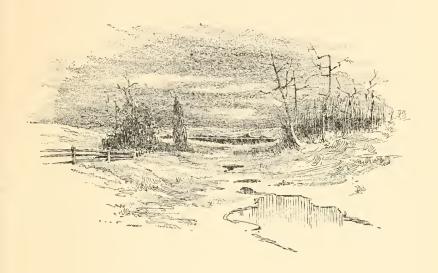


now is more brilliant than a winter sunset. The crimson fin is no less marked a feature now than the "lovelier iris" of the dove. It is the last day of winter, and all animate nature knows it as surely as we do, even to the fishes and many a creature that loves only the mud and darkness of evershaded pools.

The end of winter, as we would have it, but never actually the end. The many changes that frost effected during three long months are not to be obliterated by an hour's sunshine or the transient whispering of the south wind. We need not look for sudden transformation, and the proper aim of the rambler is to see the beginnings of what is surely to be brought about. To witness this leads to the revival of hope; the reëstablishing of our weakkneed faith. The rattling of the cricket-frog may be heard to-morrow, and a tinge of green even show upon sheltered pastures, but never be rashly confident, even though our hardier shrubs venture to the point of blossoming and the birds of early spring are singing. There was frost every month in the year less than a century ago. Again and again all plant life struggled, but in vain, and the oft-repeated

# WINTER'S LAST DAY

promise of fruit came to naught. Who shall say this may not happen again? At best, we can but hope that it will not. It is safer to be the historian of a season than its prophet.



# An Audience of One

with mankind. Parts of the same whole, it is true, but the "missing link," of which we hear, is that which would unite us more closely to the world in which we live. How can this be doubted, when we remember that we are looked upon askance by every living creature? The head of creation, it is true, but this headship, by virtue of brain growth, has been at the expense of our bodies. Physically we are nothing to boast of, and, without brains, are more helpless than any brute. A fool of a fish can swim, or fool of a bird can fly, swifter than the fool of a man can run.

Let night come, and few like Thoreau can walk in the woods and think only of their own affairs. If, happily, we are not plagued by fear, we are

## AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

teased by doubt, and the possibilities, however remote, are sure to be uppermost in our minds. All this, if alone, but how very brave when two or three are gathered together!

But, if we have company, what do we see? Simply our companions. Wild life that we feared to face, when alone, and its lesser forms, that we hoped to watch, all stand aloof. There is not a creature, beast or bird, that I have ever seen but is suspicious of a crowd, or even two or three individuals, and well it may be. The past is more likely to be repeated than a better future to dawn, and the past has nothing in its favor in respect to man's treatment of the lower forms of life.

Lest we face a lion while seeking a lamb, we must go hand in hand with our fellows, and the lion, a figment of the imagination usually, is never seen, and we are fortunate if we have a glimpse of the lamb. Why? Because the lamb is not to be seen without seeing us in return, and it sees too many for its comfort when the rambler has company. Timidity is the most marked feature of the pitiful remnant of wild life that still lingers about our farms, and not a creature but flees at the approach

of many footsteps or at the sound of many voices, or, indeed, of any. A staying curiosity controls when the silent man moves cautiously and waits patiently. The scant bravery of a bird is equal only to an audience of one.

The wreckage of the past winter exceeds in bulk that of any other I have known. Prostrate trees, branches, bushes, dead grass and the flotsam of a dozen freshets are scattered in unsightly heaps over all the meadows, but to-day they have proved a blessing in disguise. There was demand for shelter from the chilly winds, and where the sun shone in a cheerful, spring-like way there I found mice and birds and one poor blacksnake that some mishap had prematurely roused from its winter-long slumber. Companions all in misery when in the track of the icy blasts that spitefully shook the shelters we had sought, but cheerful enough when there was quiet, so cheerful that many a bird sang, and even the lazy gray spiders crept to the ends of twigs and surveyed the outlook. While I sat perfectly still, I was no more than so much rubbish, and just as likely to be made use of as such, I thought, by the creatures about me, and so it proved.



# AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

Out of the earth, as it seemed, rather than from the sky, suddenly appeared a kill-dee plover, and, with all the charm that gracefulness can give, ran to and fro before me. At times it stood motion-less and looked intently upward, as if watching for the coming of others of its kind. I thought this at the moment, and was not mistaken. Presently I heard a faint "Kill-dee, kill-dee," and then saw another of these birds, which, as it drew near, spied its fellow on the ground and joined it. The pair made a splendid addition to the little landscape, central figures, as they were, of a picture that without them had not been without merit.

We do not class the plovers among song-birds, and so far show our ignorance. No thrush, a month later, will fill a more notable rôle than did these plovers of to-day in the frost-wrecked meadows. The mellow whistling of these birds can effect a transformation, making a real spring of a day that is, in reality, but a continuance of the winter.

I have been convinced that one bird, unsubdued by the depressing conditions that prevail, can influence others, and, given an inspiring leader, the rank and file will gladly follow. I cannot otherwise

interpret what I so often see and hear. These whistling plover roused a song sparrow, and the timid bluebirds in the tall hickories began to warble as they had not done before. The sweet sounds reaching the hillside, half a mile away, moved the restless Carolina wren to greater activity, and it sang, in its own strange way, in reply to its neighbors in the meadow. The north wind might have blown a gale all the time, but no one would have noticed it. If sound thrills us, we do not feel the frost in the air. Music is thus far akin to sunshine. It quickens the hearer's pulse, and he is warmed.

All was as I wished it, as I sat still, but for no known reason I changed my position, and what a commotion I caused! A pretty wood-mouse darted into the rubbish, the stupid blacksnake slowly raised its head, butterflies danced in the sunbeams, and great black beetles hurried through the grass. Had I not been so intent upon the singing of a distant bird, what might I not have seen and heard here, sitting quietly, an audience of one. These sunwarmed creatures of the passing day may have mistaken me for driftwood. It was not so great an error on their part, as that I was ignorant of their

## AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

presence was an error on mine. To be one with the mingled wild life of the meadows does not happen every day. I strove to make my peace with these meadow-folk, but they would none of it. Their confidence was destroyed by my untimely impatience. It is evident his success as a fieldnaturalist is greatest who best develops the capacity for sitting still.

When fresh from defeat we are seldom in a receptive frame of mind, and though the best of nature's offerings are spread before us, we are apt to be blind when beating a retreat. The chances are excellent that we shall see nothing, but to-day my careless foot overturned a tower of the hermit crayfish. It was a curious structure, built of pellets of clay, and these so closely adhering that I could handle it as readily as an earthenware vessel. Perhaps the Indians got their idea of pottery from these towers, or "chimneys," as they are popularly called. Their purpose is not evident, and I know of no speculations as to the origin of the habit of erecting them. They serve, so far as man is concerned, to proclaim the whereabouts of their owners; for we have only to dig a few inches below the level

of the meadow to find the "hermit," or Diogenes crayfish, as naturalists call him. If the enemies of these crustaceans have learned the trick of toppling over the towers and digging out their builders from beneath, then the structures are not of use; but all this becomes contradictory if we dwell upon the matter too long. I leave it to some village Darwin, who, with dauntless breast, is willing to make plain why "Diogenes" builds a chimney very much larger than the one-roomed house at its base. Often as I have tried, I have never seen a crayfish at work, and possibly this is because even an audience of one is more than it will tolerate, and though much can be

accomplished by outwitting the lower forms of life, we are not equal to success in every case, and some people can never attain to any degree of

who can never sink their self-importance—something quite out of proportion to the real article.

Such is peculiarly true of those



A Cheerful Fog.

AN MAY be a bundle of contradictions and woman,—here a Carolina wren screamed out: "You wretch you! You wretch you!"—so I change the subject. No words can more aptly describe the conditions of a recent morning than that the world was wrapped in a cheerful fog. This is contradictory, for fog is the embodiment of "damp and chilly," a phrase the very mention of which suggests discomfort. Yes; it was damp and chilly this morning, but there was compensation:

the redbirds whistled in their optimistic way and from far away in the trackless mist came the trill of a field-sparrow, which series of sweet notes rendered into our language means cheerfulness, an interpretation more applicable to this little bird than to any other. But we need not look wholly to birds of any kind for an explanation of what nature means, and to-day there is many a croaking frog that has an inkling of her significance and is more confident than most mortals are that in due time this fog will roll away and the meadows bask in sunshine.

It would be very rash and probably wide of the mark to say that the little rattling frogs that now fill the whole air with this crisp and snappy sound, as of intricate machinery in rapid motion, was merely the announcement of coming sunshine and unclouded skies. It is nothing of the kind to them, but it does mean something of all this to us. This is an important distinction not always recognized. That which an animal does may have no reference to the outside world, but sometimes it has been found out that certain animal activities occur only under a given set of conditions, and, therefore,

the creatures we see or hear become proclaimers of what obtains in their vicinity, but not necessarily prophets even of the immediate future. Warm to-day and cold to-morrow may hold good of all April, and when we have despaired of having spring we find ourselves in summer. Too frequently is May intolerably hot. It is safer to accept the incidents of each day as they come, and extract their sweets, than attempt to generalize upon them as a whole and seek their bearing as to futurity. I know this foggy morning that the animal life of upland and meadows is all astir and do not propose to consider what many a gray-bearded man and wise old grandmother will tell you of the sunny afternoon that but a few hours will bring about. Sufficient unto the moment is the fogginess thereof.

Sounds from unseen sources have a merit all their own, and we are not more likely to befog ornithology by guessing what birds are singing than does the professional when he guesses at what is, on the basis of a theoretical likelihood. I hear at this moment sweetly languid notes that may be the love song of a chickadee or the phæbe-bird that has been lingering about the bridges for many a day.

But my cardinals are the birds most moved to whistle life's dull cares away, and if the fog is not soon lifted from the earth it at least rests lightly on these gay birds' shoulders. I cannot see them, and but wildly guess whether they are far or near, but the uncertainty of a fog is as pronounced as its dampness and acts as a corrective. It is as delightful as surplus moisture is depressing; even more so, and I do not misuse language when I speak of the prevailing cheerfulness.

Looking directly down I can see the well-worn narrow foot-path and know somewhat vaguely where I am going, but to step aside for a few paces is really to be lost. Groping in a fog is as uncertain as blindly feeling one's way in the dark, but there is the important difference that the sense of sight has some value in the former case, as I quickly realized as I walked slowly over the meadow. A small oak was suddenly dimly outlined before me, and how large it had grown! The tree was the same I had known for many years, yet strangely magnified. It was not a trick of the peculiar light prevailing, but was readily accounted for by the absence of other trees with which to compare it.

## A CHEERFUL FOG

Low hills are mountains to the level plain. When the conditions are normal we are influenced much more than we realize by the comparisons we are making all the while. No tree so tall but we look about for one that towers still higher; no flower so bright but we look for others that glow with a greater glory. Compared to myself the little oak was a giant, and except the grass at my feet, I could see no other object. What a chance to have a quiet chat with a tree, I thought, and doubtless would have stormed it with a volley of questions had not a bird suddenly appeared. I think it must have been by mere chance that it reached the tree. Why a bird should attempt flight through such a trackless mist is undeterminable. Enough for my purpose that it did so, and then, as if it had knowledge of my earlier impressions of the day, made good my assertion that the mist, if not cheerful of itself, was at least no dampener of a redbird's spirits. Such splendid whistling! I think our Jersey cardinals are better musicians than their Southern cousins. This lone cardinal fairly made the air tremble; or was it mere coincidence that, as it sang, drops fell in vast profusion from the oak's

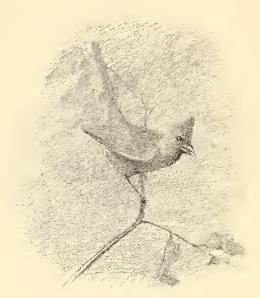
branches. The appearance concerned me more than the probabilities of the case, and I gave the latter but a passing thought. My cardinal did not look upon me so much with suspicion as with surprise, and doubtless wondered why I was out in such a place.

Surprise undoubtedly is a very common emotion among birds and not one but has an exclamation expressive of it, as they have of other impressions, as anger, love and jealousy. Do they ever give way to sorrow? This is the point where naturalists differ. That they may feel it, is a different matter. Do they express it? Is it true that the bereaved thrush sings just the same as his happy brother? May not our ears be unequal to detect a difference that really exists? How easy it is to ask questions: how difficult to rationally reply. If birds were what most books represent them to be, I had as lief listen to creaking crickets or the squeaking bat that I held by his wings a night or two ago. Psychology is a sealed book to me, but birds have a soulfulness that appeals to me more than bright feathers or tuneful notes. My fog-bound cardinal was not merely whistling that he might be heard,

### A CHEERFUL FOG

but showed by every action that every note had meaning to him, and so, of course, to all cardinals that heard him, but not yet to be interpreted by man. There is more meaning in the manner of

the shaking of his tail than in the length of his legs or convolutions of his brain. His spiritual anatomy has been left all untouched. There is a colony of cardinals close to my house and I venture to say no two of them whistle alike. Do you ever find two people with identical voices? Is not the vocal variance of my cardinals significant?



" My fog-bound cardinal . . "

An unknown influence induced the cardinal to depart, but it was no sooner gone than red-winged blackbirds by the hundred made the near-by marsh the center of the day's springtide activity. They epitomize the youthful season of the year, and while

I listen, the proud procession of each month's increasing glory passes before me. April, with her lap filled with violets; May, with her garland of fruit-tree blossoms; June, decked with the gorgeous roses. Blessed blackbirds; they may steal the farmers' corn, but place a generous sum to their credit when you recall the concerts of early spring. We may, if willing, be taught a useful lesson by such a desolate region as a dismal swamp. Think of it ringing with music and made for the time an ideal garden spot. We cannot, at the same time, think of desolation and hear a blackbird singing. I brighten my own life whenever the cheery chorus of blackbirds is echoed in my heart, and would that others would quickly learn this simple secret of attaining happiness.

What, too, could a garden be without its song-sparrow? Does not its old-fashioned song attract as strongly as the old-fashioned flowers? If some one would do justice to the song of this bird, it would be the exaltation of the humble that ought long ago to have occurred,—a task worthy of any naturalist's best efforts. We are apt to speak of the bird without realizing the full significance of

#### A CHEERFUL FOG

the name. It has, over a host of competitors, been chosen as the "song" sparrow, and right worthily does it prove equal to the expectations its name calls forth. I cannot imagine any one being disappointed in the bird.

All April, when nature saw fit to laugh at our almanacs and continue winter when and where spring had a better claim, the song-sparrow took things philosophically, and was just as ready to sing to a dismal blank of leaden sky as to the brilliant sunrise. A merit of the song not to be overlooked is that it fits words of wisdom better than any nonsense syllables one can coin. There is a sparrow in my gooseberry-hedge that all day sings, "Cheer - cheer - cheer - cheer - cheerfulness." Nothing else can be made of it, and who so prosy as to want it rendered otherwise? Why use nonsense in wording or phrasing a bird's song, when some expression can be used that is characteristic of the bird? I am duly thankful my Carolina wrens never did say "teakettle," but all sorts of things that suggest the bird, yet never one of the latter had gotten into the text-books. In them we find nothing but "teakettle," which, I am happy to

say, I never heard and never expect to. There is nothing of the wren's excessive nervous energy in the song-sparrow's singing. The wren, I take it, wants the whole world to hear him; the song-sparrow's effort is for its own entertainment. Ambitious birds, like ambitious men, are not always pleasant company; they are apt to be tiresome, but the songsparrow, combining cheerfulness with amiability, reassures you, if despondent, and demonstrates that pessimism is an outcome of weakness that a little faith can overcome. It is something to hear the sparrow singing before the roll of thunder has ceased, and better still to hear it when the driving storm deadens all other sounds. We are likely to remember it then, if not as one of many songs of a bright May morning.

I long held to the opinion that there were braver birds, but it is not true. The sparrows near my home are the last to seek shelter, and the robins are not more quick to discern the initial evidence that the storm is over. It needs but the merest pretense of a bright streak in the west to reassure the songsparrow, and it is worth all it costs to wander afield, at that moment, and hear the "Cheer-che

#### A CHEERFUL FOG

cheer-cheérfulness" that blends so admirably with the dripping weeds. Is it strange that rain drops glisten as they fall when music fills the air? There is suggestiveness in association that never appears when we consider only each isolated fact.

The semi-domesticity of the song-sparrow is another feature that commends the bird to us. will nest as near us as it can get, and were it not for the English sparrow we could have a nest in well-nigh every bush. I recall such a happy condition before the alien pest appeared, and now, going farther afield, I often find many nests in close proximity; that is, half a dozen or more in an acre of meadow. Here we have an instance of sweetness wasted on the desert air, in one sense, for how few are present to hear song-sparrows, when, in the early morning, they rejoice at the return of sunshine, or at evening, when the purple west glows the brighter because of the cheery songs that attend the day's departure. Many may think the song of a bird is not worth the trouble of walking far enough to hear it; but I have known those who, finally induced to walk so far, needed thereafter no inducement to travel that distance again and again,

and on foot, too. There is many a bitter root that has the virtue, it is said, of making our blood better if we drink a strong tea made from it. Dock, nettle, sassafras and calamus, all excellent, perhaps; but the song of a bird has power to smooth many a wrinkle and sweeten the temper. Thin your blood, if you will, with all the herbs in nature, but do not overlook your spiritual bettering. The songsparrow is a safe counselor. Does it not sing in its own irresistible way, "Cheer-ch

We are so apt to forget our humble friends when greatness appears upon the scene, that now, in the blessed month of May, when every famous songster courts attention, few listen to this master-spirit of dull winter days, and forget they ever heard it, when thrushes warble in the leafly glades. The bobolink in the meadows well merits its local name of "music gone mad"; the grosbeak and cardinal bid us pause in our rambles. The twittering of the north-bound warblers asks our patience for the moment. We are fairly bewildered by this concourse of sweet sounds, but anon there comes a lull. Save the whispering breeze, silence every-

#### A CHEERFUL FOG

where, and while we wait and wonder what has happened up from the ground springs a dear brown bird, and before even the restless robin chirps or a jay chatters we hear that simple song of other days, "Cheer-cheer-cheer-cheer-cheer-cheers." And hearing it, we wonder why it had been overlooked.

The change for which anxious stay-at-homes looked for came at last. The dull, gray, heavy fog was slowly dissolving into a lighter, yellow mist, and the sun shone dimly through, a disc of dull gold. As if its warmth was anticipated, for I am sure it could not yet be felt, there was general rejoicing throughout the land. Not a bush without its bird, not a bird without its song; and in ever-increasing volume rose the croaking of frogs without number—in very truth a million voices exulting in the sun's victory.

It is at such a time we can realize the abundance of life, and what is of greater significance, how few of the facts concerning it have been gathered. Nature can keep a secret if man cannot and woman will not. How few have been brave enough to outweather all the year's changes, to learn at last what the busy world about us has been doing.

Nature does not wear her heart upon her sleeve, but how few have that penetrative vision which sees through the coverings beneath which her real self is busy. The world is growing old. We hold ourselves as wise, but the crack o' doom will find us ignorant still. The hold of indifference is so powerful that we cannot wholly shake it off. We are all fog-bound, even when the sun shines.





Waste-land Revisited

WHILE the day was yet fresh with morning dew and the tide again creeping up the country, for, who can tell, how many millions of times, I pushed my boat from the same little wharf, took up the oars and started, as I did thirteen summers ago, for Linden Bend. I had no other thought than that of progress at the time, wishing the real journey to commence with my return, and nothing marred the plan. Here I am again, in the shade of the lindens, hearing the deep-toned murmur of a million bees

and the waters at every projecting root along shore, singing the same lullaby as in 1885. Why thresh old straw? Why tell again that there are lindens near the mill-dam and all the way down the creek to the draw-bridge that there are trees, bees, butterflies and flowers, and that at every bend of the creek we come upon old stumps, under which the turtle, catfish and many a wary creature, furred or finned, takes refuge: why repeat? The lazy, great blue heron that is now flying so leisurely over the marsh is, for aught I know, the same heron of thirteen years ago.

Here is an undisputed fact in this world of doubt: it is the same creek. Born before the glaciers to the north of it reared their threatening fronts, and keeping inviolable many a secret of prehistoric time to plague the archæologist. The same old creek in name and nature, and yet it is not the same. Just as the good, old colonial folk that dwelt along its banks have given place to—well, other people, so the shores and channel have undergone many a major or minor change. The winter's ice here and a summer shower there have left their mark. Glancing carelessly at the wide stretch of wild country in its entirety, I see what I looked upon years ago, so

I think at the moment. This is true in part and partly untrue. But, repeating my pleasant journey of years ago—it was September then, and it is June now—will I see with the same eyes? Can it be possible that I have changed more than these familiar scenes? I wonder now, while still beneath the drooping linden boughs, if I have grown less appreciative of nature and pass by much that held me years ago. There is a great deal to be said in favor of seeing with young eyes. The air is full of ghostly gravbeards, loving to criticize and eager to find fault, as I write these words, and every one is wagging his head and out of their mouths come ghostly whisperings of "rashness," "lack of judgment" and "no exercise of proper caution." I laugh now to think how, many years ago, I stood in awe of everybody who assumed to know anything of the outdoor world and wondered if I ever might attain to their wisdom. But age is too exacting, too deliberative, and the best of a good thing vanishes before it quite makes up its mind what to look for. Certainly, as many know, even if they will not admit it, age is too prone to look upon youth as necessarily inexperienced and uninformed. The truth is, a greater part

of the significance of our surroundings is none the less plain to youth because it is not talked about; and he is a dull youth who is not intellectually equipped to see understandingly when still but a boy. Whether he cares to, or not, is quite another matter, but given the desire, the ability is likewise present in sufficient measure for his needs. Better still, if he is not overweighted by too much reading. Let the facts come before him with all the freshness of a discovery, and then, above all else, let him be not afraid to speak of them as though unheard of before. The very prevalent contemptuous snubbing of enthusiastic youth by the crabbed old observer is one of those irritating experiences that youth must expect, but he can have the satisfaction of knowing such things only belittle those who forget that they once were young. To criticize youth from mere force of habit is quite unsafe, as has often been shown, for young eyes may see what has been previously overlooked, and certainly not all the discoveries in natural history have been made by men old in the service. Certain of our faculties grow less alert with age: the sight, dim; hearing, less acute; and the sense of smell equal only to detecting the

more pungent odors. When this is true, it is safer to send a boy of seventeen into the marshes to report their belongings than to trust to the observations of a man of seventy. Of course, the ghostly graybeards at my elbow vehemently protest, but as I am nearer seventy than seventeen I speak with confidence. Look out for the man, over fifty, who says, "You can't tell me anything about it!" The trouble is, he will take precious good care not to let anybody try.

As I steady my boat, at this moment, by holding to a huge grape-vine, the view before me, tree for tree, bush for bush, water for water, and sky for sky, is not the same that I saw thirteen years ago, and this is the more forcibly impressed upon me, very naturally, because I have not once been here in the meantime. Change has taken place not only in the surroundings, but also in myself. The same objects appeal to me in a different way. Whether this change is more in the one case than in the other, I do not know; but in neither, when measured accurately, is it likely to be an inconsiderable amount. Youth has no history; this grows with age. When we have it overshadowing our lives, the past rather than the

8

present is prominently before us. It is harder to-day to see the actualities than when here before. Strive as I will, it is easier to think of then, than now. Where is Aladdin's lamp now, that I may ask for young eyes to put in an old head?

The lindens, as seen from the boat, are not noticeably larger, but growth of a group of trees is not so prominent as would be the increase of a single one, seen at long intervals. To satisfy myself, I leave my boat and come down to soulless figures. the only effectual check to theorizing, and a tape-line shows that the growth has added from two to four inches to the diameters of the trees' trunks. I can see now, standing among them, that the woods are deeper and darker. I would not have thought of this had I not measured many trees and made comparisons with my old note-book of 1885. While in my boat I supposed the conditions were practically the same as those of thirteen years ago, but this was wrong, and it needed a practical test to show it. The change, to be detected from only one point of view, that of standing in the midst of the grove, was not inconsiderable. Less sunlight reached the ground. It was more damp and spongy. Dense

moss was matted about projecting roots where flowers once had bloomed. The sprout-land that I had known had become woodland. To-day, in a modest way, these trees made up a little creek-bank wilderness. Here was the cool, spicy, forest air and that dim light in which the oven bird loves to spend its summer, and here, doubtless, it startles the echoes with its vehement singing, that lacks melody but is pleasing because so earnest and well-intentioned. You become interested in the bird without reaching enthusiasm as to its methods. I neither see nor hear these birds at the moment, but redstarts and Maryland yellow-throats are abundant and fill the air with gleesome sound, and with a sandpiper along the water's edge and clattering kingfishers above the trees make it lively enough for all my needs. He is an unfortunate who can mope in the presence of four birds.

Again afloat, I see an old bird's-nest in the buttonbushes, and looking more closely, another and another. Last year, then, birds were abundant, perhaps more so than now. These old nests do not lack interest. We may be a good deal in doubt, at times, as to the identity of the builders thereof, but

there can be no question as to the origin of the nest. This is something in these days, when many people are so careful as to what is truth, they will not swear to the identity of their own shadows.

There is not so little suggestiveness in emptiness as might be supposed. A bird's nest of last year ought to bring up, at least, the certain presence of the birds that built it, and the observer is really not in touch with nature who cannot see them, aye, and hear them. To be sure, there are some minds that hold facts as boxes hold berries, but are not affected, even as berries stain the boxes they are in. A small nest high in the air, near the top of a white birch leaning over the water, suggests a yellow-throated vireo, and the bundle of sticks in a branch of an old ash, which can be seen only when the breeze pushes aside the leaves, is proof positive of last year's crows. Though every bush has a brooding bird in its twiggy depths, it is well to mark also every remnant of a nest. Some of them may be so far still intact as to show that birds were here a year or two ago that now are absent; as if you should find nests of the Baltimore oriole one year and see nothing of these birds the year after. An observing woman, speak-

ing of the birds that nested near her home, told me that the orioles "skipped every third summer." It is well known to be not unusual for a species to be well represented during one season and not found at all the next. The bobolinks swarmed in the "upper meadows" a mile from where I live until about 1863 or '64, and since then none have been seen, except as migrants; yet to the human eye there has been no change in these meadows. I know to my infinite regret, that for the first time in fourteen years I have not a single nest of rose-breasted grosbeaks within easy walking distance of my home, instead of six, as in 1897.

As I reach the more open country, and other trees—maples and willows largely—replace the lindens, the nest of a bridge pee-wee reminds me that some of "...the si holds he homes of the birds are reoccupied year after year; and here is one that has, as a foundation, a thick mat of twigs that suggests the return

. . the sitting bird, which now holds herself in a make-ready attitude, . . "

to this spot of the "phœbes" for many a summer. As I draw near, I can see one sparkling, bead-like

self in a make-ready attitude, intent upon swiftly gliding out of sight, should I draw too near. How nicely many of our birds draw the danger-line, never leaving the nest a moment sooner than they consider necessary; but this danger-line is not the same, invariable distance. The bird, I believe, considers also the evident intention of the intruder. Approach a nest, affecting not to see it, and you can get much nearer than when you have caught the bird's eye and walk directly forward.

The old-time Buzzards' Rest is not so accessible as formerly, because of accumulated driftwood, but I am told that the buzzards are gone, so other attractions must be sought by the rambler who happens here. If the buzzards roost elsewhere, as is said, it is probably not far away, for the birds themselves are as abundant as ever, though never very many at a time, except occasionally. It is an ordinary feature of the day to see them sailing in such wide circles and so very high as to suggest their being more concerned with cloudland than with earth. These, our only vultures, do not forsake us during winter as seems to be thought by many, even among those living in the country. I have wondered what

then they could find to eat. Frozen carrion sends no odors aloft and the bird is said not to have keen vision. I would like to know the truth of this; to have the question settled in favor of eyes or nose.

This retired spot appears now to be a favorite one with herons of several species. I startled two



from a mid-morning nap. They were the familiar "quoks," or night-herons, and perhaps had been awake and busy while people are supposed to sleep. From my boat I could see no nest, but this or another pair were here all last summer, I was told; so let us hope a new heronry has its beginning established. Certainly no other birds fit better with a marshy landscape, and none suggest that primitive condition which we know was a charming feature

here not many years ago; a fact that is very forcibly impressed upon me when I chance upon a flock of snowy egrets. It is not so long ago that these birds were common enough, but now they are rare.

Some forms of wild-life, though as much persecuted, still hold their own and add their mites of interest to these waste-land tracts. The bullfrog is one of these. Two, as I passed, were resting on some hidden support, with only their heads exposed. They were big of their kind, and their expression that of a hippopotamus. One, as I drew near, gave a very bovine bellow as he withdrew to the mud beneath him, but the other held his place and stared with his great lack-luster eyes; a watery, unintelligent stare as that of a floating corpse. I have always associated this species with the water and not wandering over the meadows, like the green and leopard frogs, for these very frequently take long overland journeys. The excessive rainfall of last month (May, 1898,) resulted in the formation of many a land-locked pool, which is still holding out against the summer sun. In two such little ponds I found adult bullfrogs, which must have traveled fully five hundred yards over all sorts of ground to

reach them. Why they are tempted to leave comfortable quarters in the meadows and how they acquire a knowledge of the existence of temporary upland pools, I leave it to others to determine. do not wonder that the sudden appearance of frogs long ago gave rise to the belief in underground passageways between the upland springs and their apparent outlets in the lower-lying meadows. Probably, in this case, these restless frogs wandered up the little brook that runs through several fields, and after a tumultuous course through a ravine, finds level ground again. A greater supply of food may have been the impelling motive, but it is not easy to see how the frogs knew that such more favorable conditions existed elsewhere. It is quite unlikely ever to be true, except very temporarily, and so far as human eye can detect, animal life is never lacking in the meadows, particularly such forms of it as are the natural prey of frogs. For that matter, everything is grist that comes to the bullfrog mill. have known one of these creatures to swallow a toad, and after that, nothing could be named, I think, that would come amiss.

I met with the most radical change in the condi-

tions when near what was once well known as Watson's Crossing. In 1885 there was a sand-bar where now is deeper, unobstructed water, and looking down, not for traces of early man, but for fishes, I saw a few square, flat pieces of rock in such positions as to suggest "stepping-stones" had they projected above the surface. Their position was evidently not accidental, and then the stones themselves told of transportation from the river valley, a good two miles away; for I have seen such only there, and never as erratic bowlders on the surface of the ground. Whether warranted by the facts or not, while gazing down upon them it seemed as if they could have been pressed only by the moccasined feet of Indians, if ever any human foot rested upon them. For several centuries, the geologists assert, these meadows have been sinking, and if at so slow a rate as one foot in one hundred years, the present submergence of these stones would be explained. Difficult as it is to sweep away every doubt and bring asserted theories within the bounds of proven facts this much may be confidently claimed, that man has occupied this little valley of Crosswicks Creek and the valley of the Delaware, near by,

for many, many centuries. Man's rise and progress here are easily read; his origin alone remains an unsolved mystery. Just when he came we probably will never know, but his career after that event is readily traced. A savage of the lowest type at the outset, he advanced in skill, as shown by the change from simple to complex implements of the chase, by the discovery of the potter's art, and by the development of a love of finery that led to the fashioning of purely ornamental objects. In all this, theory finds no place. It is the simple fact established by the objects themselves, considered with reference to the circumstances under which they occur.

How quickly one may pass from the prehistoric to the historic, when wandering hereabouts with open eyes and ears! Seldom has nature in the past been more active than here, and still every day, winter or summer, is a busy one. I had progressed but little beyond the supposed stepping-stones when I heard the faint tinkling of a bell; then the sound was lost for a minute or more when I again detected it, now loud, now low, and I knew what it meant. It was a cow-bell; the first I had heard for many a year but

readily remembered as a common feature of bygone days. Now the swamps are open meadows; the backwoods, farms; everything tamed down and cowbells no more needed. We cannot get lost here, now, if we try; unless where the weeds are very high and water too deep for wading. At such places, when in a boat, I have sometimes lost my bearings.

The sound of a cow-bell joins admirably with nature's meadow-music. It does not prove an annoyance, like a chattering robin when the thrushes sing, and just now there are birds of several species making merry, not only along the creek-shore, but far inland. I recalled the lines:

"In jovial June,
How sweet the merry linnet's tune;
How blithe the blackbird's lay!
The wild-buck bells from ferny brake;
The coot dives merry on the lake;
The saddest heart might pleasure take
To see all Nature gay."

This is in Scotland, but here our Jersey meadows call for tame cows instead of the "wild-buck"; all else will do. "What about the coot?" I hear asked. Well, they do dive in the little lakes and

play about the creek, and nest here, notwithstanding that some text-books say nay.

If the cow-bell could only frighten off mosquitoes, every cow turned on the meadows to browse should wear one, for these torments are more terrible than can be imagined. Only those who have had to fight them can realize what a cloud of mosquitoes means. I have seen a herd of cows dash wildly across a meadow and up the hillside to the barnyard, as if chased by dogs, and only because frantic through mosquito-bites. This insect may have a host of enemies, but they do not make any appreciable inroad on their numbers. Revenge is unworthy of manhood, it is said, and blood-thirstiness superlatively wicked, it is preached, but it is always with a deal of satisfaction that I see the larvæ of mosquitoes securely trapped by that carnivorous plant, the bladderwort. It is something well worth seeing, nor is it so small a matter of genuine pleasure to be able to say, "One mosquito less!" It is said the poison of this insect's bite is an antidote for malaria, and that people whom they do not bitethere really are such—are immune so far as chills are concerned. This assertion, remarkable as it



may seem, has good ground for being made. I, for one, am not an "immune."

Floating very leisurely along, I am aware of certain slow changes that have been effected, as my note-book of 1885 calls for some conditions not now found and others greatly exaggerated. Certainly one little island has come into existence, with a handbreadth of grass and a pretty little maple tree. My boat, fourteen years ago, passed directly over where the island now is, and if I mistake not the water was four or five feet deep at high tide. So complete a change as this in so short a time is very suggestive and shows how careful the archæologist should be in estimating the age of a relic by the depth at which it was discovered. What if I had lost my pocket-knife overboard fourteen years ago? It is safe to come to any conclusion only after a deal of study. Never let one swallow constitute a summer. Nature has no intention of deceiving you, but has her own way of setting her facts before you for consideration. If you do not attend to that, you will deceive yourself. She builds up an island in a night that looks like the work of ages, but she

does not say how or when she built it; that is for you to find out.

I have heard of men's work, intended to be permanent, proving to be very temporary, and of that which they asserted to be merely temporary, remaining a fixture during their lives. I thought of this when I noticed what to me appeared to be the unstable muddy shores of the meadows. The never-ceasing tides make no measurable impression upon them. Slight sketches of certain points enabled me to recognize these mud-banks as quite the same now as then. Though the muskrat may make a new burrow, and crayfish at one point and mole-crickets at another, tunnel the earth among the coarse grass-roots, still the ground holds intact and I miss none of even the minor features of my earlier and more critical visit. Whether my ancestor, who in the first decade of the last century reclaimed some of these meadow-tracts, would recognize them now, is

. . tunnel the earth . .

his day have been removed. Where changes of moment have occurred, they have been cataclysmic. A tree upon the creek's bank blown over, with its top sinking to the bottom of the stream, acts as a check to the normal flow, and mud quickly gathers. The trunk of the tree is gathered for fire-wood, but not the twigs. They are worth no labor, even as kindling; and so the wind is allowed to plant a treetop and grow an island. Soon birds sing where but a little while ago other birds swam. I found a songsparrow's nest in a bush on one of these new-born isles, where a kingfisher might have dived for minnows when I was here before. So there are changes, but if we look closely and remember well, the creek is the same, as a whole, when we take only comprehensive glances at it as we pass by. Thus it is that observers contradict one another, and we often contradict ourselves. To-day I might have paid attention to but one bank of the creek, or the other, and said without hesitation that I saw no change. How often we pass by, without seeing it, many an object of interest, intent at the time on something far from where we are. But no absent-mindedness prevented me from seeing a change of a most suggest-

ive sort,—that of nature reclaiming an abandoned enterprise of man. An old flood-gate, or what remained of it, was now covered with moss where it stood above the tide, and in every available nook and cranny grew weeds of several kinds. Insects had tunneled it; snails had worn tracks in the yielding decay upon its surface and rust had replaced the tough iron of a one-time bolt. The small stream that here had once emptied into the greater volume of the main creek was no longer to be traced across the level meadow. Here, indeed, time had worked effectively, if slowly, and obliterated not only nature's own work, but was fast removing what had at one time been an anxious care of man.

Before reaching the mouth of Mill Creek, nature's masterpiece for many a mile around, the water became shallow and clear, with wide reaches of sandy bottom over which passed and repassed endless forms of life, some so small they seemed but grains of sand, yet I could quite distinctly see them and the narrow, thread-like lines they drew across the rippled channel of the stream. To lean over the gunwales and peer into the depths has never yet proved tiresome to me. I forget then that there is

"An old flood-gate, or what remained of it, . . ."



such a thing as time. As hours were shortened to minutes when Cowper watched his squirrels, so has the morning passed unheeded when strange creatures furrowed the sand or flashed in the water beneath me. No fish, crustacean, aquatic bug, turtle, snake, or diving beast or bird, ever proved a bore. There is death beneath the smiling waters of old Crosswicks Creek as there is death and all else that is horrible above it; nor do we see less of it when looking in the water than over any landscape. nature's under-side of things is less repugnant when you look through the denser medium. The minnow in the jaws of a pike is not so disagreeable a sight as the squeaking mouse in the jaws of a snake. Illogical and absurd as this may seem, I have always found it to be true. In the former case I am interested; in the latter, moved to pity or disgust. I have found others who were moved in much the same way. All of which goes to show that consistency is a small matter in the general make-up of mankind.

As I let the boat drift where it might, since it could not seriously go astray, and looked over its side I was impressed with the apparent permanency

of the ripples in the sand. They were definitely arranged, presenting a pretty pattern, worthy I thought, of the attention of a carpet-weaver, unless a rippled carpet would be trying to the eyes. Here the watered sand resembled watered silk, torn here and there by the track of a mussel or some smaller shell, and with holes punched through it where the snout of a turtle or the nose of an eel had pierced the fabric. In spite of all such defects, if we may call them so, the general effect was excellent, and a naturalist could ask for no better background as a field for extended observation.

Job Stillcreep, who mends ditches in winter that he may loaf all summer, told me some years ago that in opening a new ditch across a meadow he came across white sand under three feet of black mud, that "was all wrinkled-like as you looked at it when you cut down with a spade." Here, it is evident, had been a little side-stream, of which there are now many, such as the one once shut off from the main creek by the rotting flood-gate I had found to-day, but obliterated by natural processes, the mud gradually filling the channel when the current was obstructed, but so gently that the ripple-marks were

not disturbed. In some thousands of years hard sandstone may be formed, for in the glacial drift, with its pebbles of all sorts—some reshaped by primitive man—are slabs of ripple-marked stone, and sometimes, as if to tell a more thrilling story, the tracks of animals and impressions also of their bodies are preserved. Past, present and future: how they speak to us, even in this rippled sand, warm, bright and beautiful as the clear, blue sky that looks lovingly down upon it.

We can seldom get behind some simple fact which is the starting-point of our observation; in this case, that of a creature merely moving of its own accord. I see a mussel now—as I have seen hundreds before—and many a smaller shell, moving along the bed of the stream; but what is the impelling motive? We seem never to be able to get behind the scenes to see life's drama as the public is supposed not to see it, and indeed does not. To the average man a mussel seems as well off in one spot as another. It can secure food without seeking it by constant change of base. It is not compelled to go roaming about in this apparently aimless way, but travels of its own free will. It is hard to imagine that such

a lump of flabby flesh can have aught to do with consciousness. But thrust down a slender switch and touch the mussel ever so gently, and with a snap it closes its two shells that are so neatly hinged, and that same mussel becomes to us no more than a pebble in the sand. I have anchored these mollusks and know that they can live without traveling for a year. Two that I kept years ago in an aquarium lived over two years, but did not grow or gain in weight. Possibly, if I came here to-morrow, the mussel I am now watching might still be here, but more than likely—being restless now—it will be several rods away. The pace of a tortoise, though proverbially slow, is speedier than that of a mussel; yet an inch a minute means one hundred and twenty feet in a day, if the animal traveled without rest for twenty-four hours. However, they can for a brief space travel more rapidly, but appear baffled when they meet with obstacles, and the idea of "going 'round" travels slowly through their brains.

Looking into the water is no more free from petty annoyances than looking through the air. Just now there was a streak of glittering light, a flash as if a sword-blade cut the creek in half, and that was all.

No noise, no subsequent commotion. I was startled, and drew back with an abruptness that bewildered for an instant, and yet it was only a large, silvery-sided fish that darted by. Unfortunately there are several such fishes in these waters and it is hard to prevent oneself wondering which of the several this one was.

Quickly following the silvery flash that, for the instant, disconcerted me, was a more marked commotion that roiled the water and left me to guess again and remain in ignorance. I could be certain of one fact, however; it was a slower-moving object and of dark color. Its course was too direct for a catfish and the speed too great for a turtle, and the locality was not suggestive of the star-nosed mole, so I incline to think it was a mink. It obliquely crossed the creek, as one of these animals might do if it wished merely to avoid being seen by me. Minks are very cunning. Pursued by trappers, persecuted by farmers and with less of favorable territory available year after year, it is little wonder they have been forced to bestir themselves and cultivate cunning, that they may hold their own against the adversity that besets them. They are not desir-

able neighbors from a purely economic point of view, I know, and yet I sincerely like them, as I do every other form of so-called vermin.

I have mentioned the star-nosed mole. It is an interesting animal and, in this neighborhood, not nearly so abundant as the common, upland form. I find them about the ditches, where they have burrows that sometimes open beneath the surface of the water, into which they toss themselves in a rather unmethodical or precipitous way when they leave their underground retreats; but once in the water there is no longer any trace of awkwardness. I have seen them swim so rapidly, when deeply submerged, as to make them a close second to the mink in the matter of speed. Probably it is only for a short distance that this rapid swimming can be kept up, while a mink can remain under the surface for so long a time that it suggests their carrying a supply of air with them, as does a pretty diving-spider that is common in Poætquissings Creek. I think, from my scanty observations, that at times minks come only near enough to the surface to get their nostrils in the air, and so are not detected however closely we look for them. The coot and



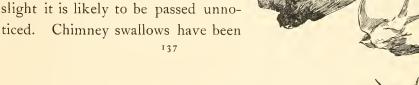
devil-diver, among aquatic birds, will do this, as is well known. With not the slightest portion of their bodies showing, minks will carry fishes to the shore, the latter held wholly out of the water.

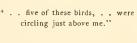
When the water cleared I resumed my uncomfortable, cramped position, with my face close to the water, that I might again look into the depths, but was interrupted by sounds from overhead. familiar twittering of barn-swallows was plainly heard and I found that five of these birds, three males and two females, were circling just above me. I noted, also, several purple martins. than the others, they puzzle me of late, for I can find no evidence that they are nesting near by. There are no martin-boxes within four miles of here, and it is improbable that any of these birds wander this distance from their summer quarters, swift of wing as they are. If a few, stray pairs have resumed the habits of remote ancestors and taken up their abode in some hollow tree, it would be most interesting. Concerning purple martins, two facts confront us; one, that many of the boxes erected for them have long been in possession of the English sparrow; and the other, that the martins are still here, but in fewer

numbers than formerly. If ignorance years ago had not had the upper hand and imported the sparrow,

and if, instead, common sense had protected the martins and provided new boxes when the old ones tumbled down, we would have less call for spraying fruit-trees and would save much of what now is lost by the destroying hordes of sparrows that settle in clouds upon the ripening grain. But it is the conditions of to-day that concern us, and we find that the useful martin has not been exterminated by the imported bird, though often replaced by it, and a sorry exchange it is. The native bird was here at one time, semi-domesticated, and now I find on these Crosswicks meadows what appear to be the martins of, we will say, colonial days, a wild martin and so a dweller possibly in some cave or hollow tree. If not, where are we to look for their nesting-sites? There is certainly no reason why they should not return to the localities originally chosen by them. Change of habit due to change of surroundings is no novel fact, and when the change is but

137





found in at least one hollow tree near where I now am, and many a robin has built in movable structures like swinging bridges and about railway stations. Swallows and pee-wees build every year on open, iron bridges, over which wagons and even cars are constantly passing, and the English sparrow nests in mill-yards amid the jar and roar of machinery that ought to drive any creature, except some people, out of their wits. I am confident I will yet find these meadow-haunting martins nesting in a hollow tree. Possibly others have been more fortunate, and it may be nothing uncommon, but I am not concerned with what other people know.

My boat, for several minutes while my thoughts were in the air, had drifted over a muddy, weedy bottom, where the water was dark and almost opaque, when I thought again of the aquatic life that so recently had occupied my attention. I could see nothing now. The mud absorbed the light—no direct sunlight reached the surface—and it was all as gloomy as a dull, November afternoon. Much of the creek must be in this somber condition all summer. The vegetation along shore is so densely leaved and hangs out so far over the stream that

there is very little opportunity for a sunbeam to slip through the blockading barrier of dense foliage.

We often look in vain for signs of life in these black waters that through trick of light suggest great depths, and at such a time imagine endless, winding caverns where strange creatures dwell, and so people it in rather a fantastic fashion. We offer imagination more elbow-room than even it can occupy; but think what we will, there never was, even in mythology, life that was more linked with destruction than we actually find among the insects that swarm in many a pool and shady bend of the creek, where the water is less rapid in its course than in the open, unobstructed channel. Ranatra, Nepa, Notonecta, Belostoma; names, these, that may have no meaning to most people, and not much more to those who recall by them shriveled cabinet-specimens, pinned and labeled, of big and little waterbugs; but watch these creatures where they are at home and you will believe, then, all that has ever been said of them, and learn, too, that some of them can do something more than murder little fishes. They can force you to withdraw your hand from the water very quickly by nipping your fingers in a most

effective way. There are other ways of observing aquatic insect-life than by watching it along the illumined edges of darkened areas, which is unsatisfactory because so often it happens that we have but a glimpse of the tragedy—one scene only of the whole act; better to go to the ditches where there is more light and opportunities are better because of the more circumscribed area, or by means of an aquarium. This last, to my mind, is the most satisfactory of all, for much is gained by being comfortably fixed at home and having a bit of the marshes before you to be studied at leisure. Aquaria are no trouble. Why they have so generally gone out of use I do not know. Certain it is, however, that a glass box a foot square is infinitely better than a school-year with the average text-book and a teacher that only breaks the silence with long, Latin names.

Out of the shadows into the sunlight again, and now into a world so full of life that to keep but one object in view is impossible. No course of one bird in the air but is intersected by a dozen others, and it were as easy to follow a single thread of a tangled spider's web. Birds everywhere and not one of them mute. The following species I plainly heard

and no one can fail to recognize their songs after they have heard them once. There were the redeved, white-eved and warbling vireos, cat-bird, wood-thrush, chat, cardinal, rose-breasted grosbeak, song-sparrow, swamp-sparrow, marsh-wren, redstart, summer warbler, least flycatcher, great-crested flycatcher, grakle, red-winged blackbird, crow, kingfisher, green heron, and spotted sandpiper. Here were twenty-one birds, all adding their share to the volume of sound that filled the valley, and then the chirping and twittering of other unseen birds, too indefinite to make sure of the species, must not be overlooked. Beyond the creek's banks, over the wide meadows, at the same time, the frogs and toads were croaking and there was, as always, that gentle undertone, a vague humming that I attribute to insect-life. If, for a moment, the birds and batrachians are quiet, this murmur seems to increase in volume, and we listen with strange interest to an undefined earth-sound that comes with the first warm days of June and does not cease until the first general frost of mid-autumn. It is the volume of sound as much as the objects seen that causes us to realize that nature now is at high-tide.

Again afloat, I am following now a wider and less winding channel that some five miles away ends at the river. I do not know if it is wise to take one's cue from the first bird heard in the early morning. Such whims encourage superstition,—a weed of too vigorous a growth in all of us. But fight such nonsense as we may, we cannot forget the meaning of the word "omen," and I took it to be a favorable one that as my boat left the landing, headed for any inlet, cove, shady nook or inviting shelter of overhanging trees, I heard a white-eved vireo. It put me in a happy, confident frame of mind. Its song is suggestive of energy, and I must prove no laggard. This was not probable, for there was no port in the wild region before me but I could heartily welcome, if with glimpses of nature at her best it welcomed me. Happily, in this case, no serious exertion was called for at the start, for who has not found it easy to go with the tide? It is direful to have eves and see not, but savors of bliss to have legs, vet walk not, nor yet remain motionless. To be in an open boat is the only attractive substitute for walking, and one must be alone to extract all the sweetness. You are in excellent company with

nature, and crowded if aught else is added. Floating, I found myself closely akin to the drifting twigs that traveled with me, twirled and tossed by every counter-current or breath of wind, and seeking no predetermined quiet cove where the rest that living creatures ever hope for may be awaiting even it.

Very peaceful now, and as I pass the denselvwooded shore, pausing a moment where a great tree at the water's edge offers a landing-place too inviting to be resisted, I see, or think I do, where the rude earthworks were thrown up more than a century ago that the advance of King George's soldiers might be checked. The drawbridge, not a musket-shot away, had been pretty much demolished by the Americans, and when an attempt was made to repair it there was a lively skirmish, and it proved effectual, too, for the British retired to join their comrades further up the creek. Civilization, as men call it, was more active then than ever since at this wild spot, but because it was civilization run mad, overleaping itself and landing in savagery, perhaps it is that now there has been a reverting to the other extreme and we have nature here unsullied, undefiled, even unmarred by man's peaceful, beneficent activities.

Whatever the cause, the present conditions are such as I hoped to find, for nature is never disappointing. Let the mountains sink to the level of the plain, the river dwindle to a trifling brook, wild-life vanish to but a single, singing bird; still, if it is nature that hath wrought the change, the result is never commonplace. There will not be lacking some attractive feature, and so to-day the trees, the shadows, the silent flow of the unresting tide and the noiseless flight of wandering water-fowl, breathed of peace, and I rejoiced, even more than at the outset; I was revisiting my beloved Waste-land.

It is little strange that I find these waste-land tracts intensely green. May (1898) was the wettest month on record. It is needless to go back to statistics and compare the amount of rainfall one year with another. It is how rain falls, not how much, and so last month was the wettest. Every drop was stored away and many a field is now damp that ordinarily is dusty; and springs have appeared where none have existed for half a century, and brooks that are dry in midsummer are now creeks that have cozened fish into their new-born depths. Old Crosswicks is deep now at low-tide where usually it is

shallow, and the marshes over which I have so often walked offer nowhere a firm foothold. No wonder, then, that all vegetation is superlatively green, and the open water reflects that color rather than the blue of the summer sky above it. It would prove monotonous were it of a uniform shade and not relieved, too, by wreaths of blooming blackberry; by spiræa and button-bush, white as a December snow-drift. I mark with pleasure, too, that here, as in my door-yard, the buttonwoods are still leafless and their bare, gray branches break the green line that divides the earth and sky, for these buttonwoods are our tallest trees, except the tulip-poplar, and what splendid, commanding outlooks do they provide for the many birds! Crows are calling to their brethren while perched above the surrounding woodland; the little herons survey the boundless marshes from these leafless heights, and even the song-birds are moved to mount so high above the earth and send a message of love to brooding mates hidden in the leafy depths below. The gentle bluebird, a veritable wanderer now, forever appearing and disappearing in a mysterious way, was heard but not seen; veritable ghost of the bluebird of other days, mourn-

10

ing over the fate that has overtaken it. It affords almost no pleasure to hear them now, recalling, as they do, the melancholy fact that man, not nature, drove them from their old-time homes.

The little streams, with sources hidden not far away in the trackless marsh, or in the remnant of the mighty forest, offer more for contemplation and painstaking study than does many a furlong of the main stream. Small as is the world, it is on too grand a scale for most people, and when we find it brought down to our own level our energies are spurred to healthy action and not depressed by immensity. Even Crosswicks Creek, thirty miles long, will pass away in the indefinite future without a biographer. Those who linger longest about its banks and float forever to and fro upon its bosom have but a speaking acquaintance with it. An intimate acquaintance even with a little creek has been vouchsafed no man. The most that the state and United States map-makers have told us is that the stream is straighter than it really is, a conclusion naturally reached because they found the region a hard one to travel. A miniature river half a mile long is problem enough for any man to solve.

A genuine spirit of adventure took hold of me as, with senses alert, I turned the boat's prow into a sheltered cove, where the rapid waters of a by-stream mingled with the hurrying tide of old Crosswicks.

Just as we people the darkness with life that we never think of during the day, so the dense shade is ever more mysterious than sunlight. The banks of the miniature creek were too near together to permit progress beyond a boat's length, but this was sufficient to bring about a complete change. I could see but a little way inland, and had I not known the real conditions, might have thought the forest about me was miles deep. The trees were so near each other, the branches so completely interlocked and the underbrush so dense a growth that no progress by land was practicable. So much might lurk in a spot like this that every stray sunbeam flitting across the vision's little field is suggestive of some creature dwelling here. A hundred birds'-nests ought to be here, I thought, and I found only the remnant of one, perhaps more than a year old, and now the foundation of a most elaborate home of a big gray spider. Seeing only this ill-natured creature, I was

a little disappointed, and forgetting I had probably frightened many a bird and beast away by my noisy entrance into this retired spot, I turned to the dark waters and saw one of my old favorites. Under a projecting root was a black pirate-perch, the owl, if there is one, among our small fishes, and a most murderous fellow besides. Others do not paint him half so black, but I have kept many in aquaria and have very often seen them with fishes too big to be swallowed extending from their jaws, and with their prey before their eyes all day in this fashion, they would rest almost immovably, awaiting the digestion of the cumbrous meal.

Though the wood-thrush came to the thicket, and a chat returned to the tree nearest to where I sat, and a meadow-mouse ran the length of a snaky, half-submerged limb of a dead tree, and twice a turtle popped its head above the water, I was not content to remain, but, restless as a Gipsy, looked again about me when out in the current of the main stream, and I soon noticed a most inviting shelter from the noonday sun, formed by the intertwined and overhanging branches of ninebark, the splendid show of bloom now rusty-red or of dazzling white-

ness as the buds were still closed or widely open. As the boat rather rudely brushed the drooping twigs, I was showered with thousands of tiny petals. In a June snowstorm, as it were, and a charming bit of nature's playfulness it was, seeming to cool the air, and stirring to activity the dry bones of the dead winter. There was a difference of twelve degrees in the temperature, and this means a great deal when it is nearly a hundred in the sun. The ever-abundant catbirds were very tame and brought me, so I fancied, a welcome message from the garden-lot at home. It is always pleasant to find your loyalty greater than you thought, and, for instant, I wished I was there, though I had been absent but a few hours. The creek, the ninebark bower and the steamy marshes sank from sight, and I saw about these creekside catbirds only the reddening cherries on the old garden tree and a happy host of thrushes feasting there without hindrance. There will be fruit for me and to spare, so I give that matter no thought, but why should I were it otherwise? The cherries on

"The ever-abundant cat-birds were very tame, . . "

my tree are very red, but none so pretty as the birds that eat them; no cherries sweeter than are these of mine, but the song of the bird is sweeter than the tree's fruit.

No less entertaining was the passing and repassing overhead of several night-herons. They suddenly appeared and wandered to and fro in the bright sunshine, as if searching for some resting-place they could not find, and so would not be comforted. I felt as if my sudden vanishing from creek to ninebark cove had made them suspicious, but I persisted in not showing myself. At last one came very near and, I thought, looked down as if to spy me out. I made an effort to imitate the heron's cry, and succeeded in frightening the bird away. Looking as best I could into every tree, by aid of my field-glass, I found in one of a near-by cluster, a bunch of sticks that might have been a heron's nest, but no bird went near it for so long a time I was probably mistaken. Certainly there was nothing anywhere suggestive of a heronry, yet there are enough of the birds within the area of the tide-water marshes to sustain a very considerable one. Doubtless all these birds belong to the heronry some five miles away,

which I rejoice to know is carefully protected. I have had no opportunity, as yet, to study any of its features, but now naturally recall, and here let me tell the story of my own upland heronry within sight of my home.

When April's lengthening days gave promise of bud and blossom, and the abundant sunshine warmed the secluded nooks and corners of the vinetangled swamps, the little green herons came again to their haunts of the past summer. For three long months they have been passing daily, from dawn to dark, over the fields on their journey to the meadows and back to the wooded sink-hole, where their nests are built. The green heron is not more active at one time of day than at another, and is too busy, judging from all appearances, to quietly rest and day-dream, so characteristic of other herons. It is in no sense a solitary bird, and if a dozen or twenty seen together may be called a flock, it is, to that extent, gregarious. Furthermore, they are cautious rather than shy, and soon learn to know that they need not be forever on the alert, if not molested by those who happen frequently to pass by. I have had a colony of these birds near me for several

years, but only of late have I paid close attention to the routine of their lives.

Nest-building commenced quite promptly on their reappearance in April, and a more careful observation than heretofore of the construction of these nests shows that the twigs of which they are made are interlaced, rather than laid together, and so are more permanent structures than I had previously supposed. As seen from beneath, they give the impression of flimsy structures, and frequently the eggs can be seen distinctly as we look upward. This condition and the fact that the young often creep from them and sit upon near-by branches long before they are able to fly, add to the delusion, but when we attempt to remove a nest or pull it to pieces it is found to be more like loosely-woven cloth than a haphazard gathering of little sticks.

A more interesting fact is that while the herons come all at one time, the nesting is not a matter of the first few weeks only of their summer sojourn. Eggs are laid in the old nest after the first brood are half or but a third grown; so that when the summer is well advanced we have birds in all stages of growth in the heronry. Thus, June 23d, I found

eggs just ready to hatch and young birds that could fly a short distance, and at this date, July 7th, there are newly-laid eggs in a nest still occupied by young birds, and the question arises, can it be that the warmth of these fledglings, rather than that of the parents, is depended upon to hatch them? So far, at least, are all appearances, and how far we may safely judge from them is, perhaps, a question; but read aright or wrong, there is a degree of irregularity or uncertainty about nesting in a heronry that has been overlooked, judging from such statements as have come under my notice. Certainly we cannot speak of a "breeding season" as a portion only of their summer sojourn, for young birds, still too weak to fly far and needing parental attention, have been noted as late as August 15th. Later than this I have not found evidences of continued nesting, but it is not improbable that it occurs. As the bankswallow leaves eggs and helpless young behind when it goes south for the winter, in September; and as long-eared and barn-owls, having permanent homes in hollow trees, have young at all times from April to September, so it is true of the little green herons. When they have settled down for the sea-

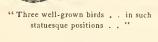
of growth in the heronry."

son in their chosen haunt, and which they do not forsake unless forced to do so, the reproduction of their kind occupies all their thoughts, and they have no vacation period until the summer begins to merge into autumn.

Green herons are certainly not musical, but their

weird cry, an explosive "wough!" is delightfully suggestive. There is the element of "wildness" about it that invariably attracts the lover of nature. It brings out the full significance of marshy meadow or the dimly-lit void above us, as salt makes our food more savory; but this single cry is by no means the bird's only

utterance. We have but to take



our place in the heronry and await developments to learn how varied a vocabulary is theirs. To-day I heard a chuckle, low peeping, and even hissing, from the old birds, just in from the meadows with food; and there were low chirpings, gutturals and other strange sounds made by the young in response to the greetings of the parents.

In all, a veritable babel that kept up until the old birds departed. What interested me, perhaps more than all else, was the fact that the half-grown birds maintain such motionless attitudes when alone; that is, while waiting for their food. Three well-grown birds sat on a small birch tree in such statuesque positions that I discovered them by mere accident, though only a few feet away. They held their beaks aloft, and I wondered if this was for protection, for it would have fared badly with any hawk to have swooped upon them from above.

The position was an excellent example, too, of protective coloration, for the sparsely-feathered neck and slender, streaked head and beak were collectively quite as varied in color and shaggy as a birch limb. Even after locating these young birds, if I turned away for a moment it was not always easy to find them again. With the aid of a field-glass they were sufficiently distinct to be carefully studied, but not so with the naked eye at a distance of twenty yards.

All things considered, a heronry is not a pleasant place in which long to linger. The ground was white with droppings and fragments of fish, or such

this refuse appeared to be; a half-digested, slimy mass that offended the nostrils as keenly as it did the eye; and naturally enough, insects swarmed as I have seldom seen them elsewhere. A paradise, one might think, for fly-catching birds; yet careful search failed to reveal a single nest of wood pee-wee, the vireos, or warbler. Indeed, no other birds, except purple grakles, frequented the spot. Why these had chosen to nest here was not apparent, unless the proximity of a pea-patch, which they disastrously raided, had to do with it.

It is not until September that the heronry is abandoned. There does not appear to be any interim when the birds frequent the marshes and forsake the upland woods—in this case a little sinkhole, filled with small trees—nor is the exodus a gradual one. They are all here to-day, and to-morrow all are gone. Unlike the night-heron, single birds or pairs do not stay throughout the winter; yet these green herons are not greatly inconvenienced by wintry conditions. More than once in the last decade we have had snow, ice and bitterly chill winds from the northeast, yet the birds preserved their serenity of temper and pursued their

fishing and frogging in the marshes, and endless journeys therefrom to their homes, in the same quiet, methodical way that characterizes their coming and going during the summer.

The wandering night-herons no longer in sight, I turned again to my immediate surroundings and, strange to say, became mathematically inclined, which too often is to make the world less lovely than when we see it in our imaginative moods. began counting the circular disks of little blossoms, but tiring, cut the matter short by a fair estimate. The blossom-laden front of this clump of ninebark was thirty feet long and eleven high, and by counting here and there a measured square foot, I concluded the three hundred and thirty square feet contained over eight thousand floral disks. This was only one of many such exhibitions of wild spiræa in bloom, and when near-by there is the pale-blue flag, or flaming phlox, or in the water the golden, globular bloom of spatter-dock, we realize how often these waste-land tracts have a beauty that compares well with the trim gardens of suburban homes. Wild flowers, like the songs of wild birds, appeal to something within us that we have not,

fortunately for us, under absolute control. We do not attempt to criticize the arrangement of the blossoms, or the key upon which a bird's song is pitched. What we see and hear in waste-land is something too sacred to be brought to the level of our artificiality, and hath a charm so potent that the naturalness that is in us comes to the front in force. It is a distinct gain to forget our true selves and be for the moment as natural as the handiwork of nature about us.

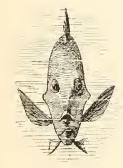
No outing can be perfect under an unclouded sky. The quick transition from sunlight to shade brings out many a beautiful effect that would otherwise be missed. We cannot realize all there is in a green tree until we see it, with a background of plum-colored cloud, suddenly suffused with golden light. The change is marvelous, every leaf having a distinct glory of its own. That such clouds may mean a shower must not disconcert us. The fear of a dash of rain robs the rambler of half his joy. I pity the man whose sole object in life is to take care of his clothes.

As the tide runs out and leaves exposed the long reaches of gently-shelving shores I am reminded

that these tortuous, ribbon-like bands between the shrubbery, the tree-trunks with their intricacy of twisted roots and the water is nothing but brown mud, slippery, treacherous as humankind, and now glittering in the sunshine, as if to invite the unwary wanderer to discomfort, if not destruction. Slippery, slimy mud, but is this all? It is as false of mud as of pitch to say that we cannot touch it and not be defiled. It is astonishing how many catchy phrases tickle our ears and form a part of some flimsy scheme we proudly call philosophy. Newly-exposed mud may be forbidding at first glance; the more so when no trace of life is to be seen, but the first glance is not often the all-important one. A mink, awaiting our next movement, may be only a projecting tree-root to us. I have little doubt that we are so often satisfied with a single, careless glance at some limited spot that we lose more in a year than we gain in saner moments by attentive examination.

As I look over the side of the boat, the mud I see is too soft for the pretty sandpiper that balances itself now on projecting twigs or the occasional flat stone that it finds. But while we look, this same mud is drying very fast, or draining rather, and at

the available instant insect-life appears, and one semi-aquatic spider runs over the smooth surface with the speed and general manner of a tiger-beetle on the hot, dry sands. Spiders have more eyes and sharper ones than ours, and we can only account for their actions now as being in search of food. It is certainly not for the sake of mere exercise that they dart erratically about, and ever and anon suddenly stop and expend their energies on some object too minute for me to detect. One spider that I was watching disappeared so suddenly that I was moved to look more closely, and I saw what I had taken for a stone was the projecting eyes and snout of a fullgrown bullfrog. Heads without bodies are not always easy to recognize. Look, for instance, directly in the face of a sunfish, seeing nothing of the body, and the staring eyes and slowly-moving cheeks, backed by crimson "ear-flaps," will suggest anything but what really confronts you. It is rather some strange creature that is calculated to startle a novice, and no reasoning will convince him, it too often proves, that he has not seen an impossible monster. It is thus that waste-land is largely peopled by the ignorant crowds who occa-



160

sionally picnic here; and confidence in their unskilled powers of observation is like many a weed in the grass-plot—ineradicable.

As the mud stiffened in the hot sunshine, the bullfrog slowly emerged and took shape before me. We stared at each other in most impudent fashion, but as neither moved it was only a matter of exchange of glances. Slowly I raised one arm and very gradually extended it towards the watchful frog, but he proved no fool. Before I had attempted to make any advance the creature had determined the danger-line. When my hand passed this, with one mighty leap the frog reached the water and dived into its depths.

There is too little, it will be claimed, in such an incident to warrant its recording. True, to a certain extent, but if it induces another to watch a frog under similar circumstances there is this much gained, that he will see a great deal that is not easily, if at all, made plain by mere description. Outlines are not to be sneered at if they are offered as such and not paraded as evidence of profound knowledge. Use and abuse of outlines marks the difference between wise and otherwise.

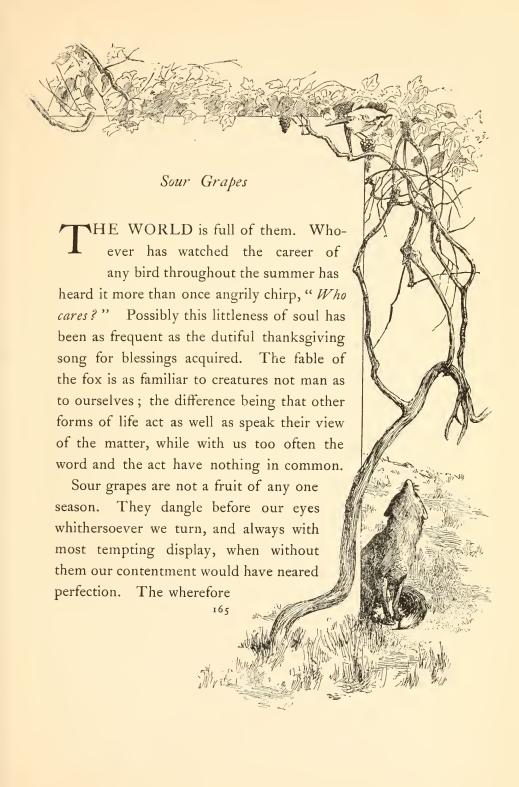
The song of a winter bird in June is a delightful feature of a hot, summer day. The white-bellied nuthatch was heard at intervals earlier than the present moment, but now one of them is directly overhead, and as a cloud shuts out the sunlight so the bird's complaining cry shuts out the summer, and it is cool October, or even icy winter, for the instant. These birds are seldom seen about my door-yard trees during the hot weather, but replace the summer migrants very promptly in autumn and make winter far less dreary than the season without birds would surely be. Though the air was all a-tremble with the singing hosts of summer, I heard only this lonely nuthatch, and had a vision of leafless trees, ice-bound brooks and snow-clad fields. Such seemingly trivial interruptions to the crowded procession of a summer day are not so meaningless as might appear; or why is it they remain so distinctly impressed upon the memory and are readily recalled, while many a major fact is dimmed and irretrievably lost in a few, short hours? I recall the nuthatch now, days after it was seen and heard, while I am transcribing these field-notes, and the sound of its unmusical cries is heard and rings in my ears even

though I passed directly from the ninebark cove to a small, tortuous, inflowing by-creek, which might well be called the grosbeaks' paradise. Both the cardinal and the rose-breast were here at home, and in the shade of stately trees they sang those matchless songs that should cure us of longing for the nightingales of other lands. I was charmed at the time, but to-day I have but the bare recollection of a fact, and above the mingled songs of many birds about my study window, I hear that lonely nuthatch.

If any possible combination of conditions suggests the luxury of laziness, it is drifting with the tide. The up-country flow has begun. Casting loose from the dense shade of a hemlock, I shove the boat amidstream and, for the time, give it no further thought. Sooner or later I will be back to the pretty, rural wharf from which I started, unless I am held by the bushes or some sunken snag. This is easily remedied, and being the only possible need for exertion, I do not worry: never crossing bridges until I come to them. Now, more than ever, I am the guest of the creek, and as willing to be borne by the tide as an infant to be carried in its nurse's arms. My attention is withdrawn from the crowded

world, for waste-land here is teeming with life. I scarcely notice the contest between wind and tide that sometimes holds me as fixed to one spot as the trees on shore. Then I move on again, and my valued day-dreams fill my whole existence. The world is happy, and so am I. As the sun sinks behind the distant forest I hear a dull, grating sound and feel my progress checked: my boat has found its way home almost without the aid of the guiding oar.





of their existence is a problem fit for fools and philosophers. That happy medium, the average man, shows wisdom better by simply facing the aggravating fact rather than spending a lifetime exercising choice between the solutions of the problem offered. There are the grapes, and I say, as I have heard birds and beasts say, and even insects seem to say, "Who cares?"

What manner of man is he who takes such a position; who shall say? Possibly it is unwisdom to attempt ignoring the omnipresent grapes, but it may be worse to permit them to spoil a sunny, October afternoon. Alas! the common suggestion of ignorance to look another way is only intensified aggravation. There is no other way, or one wherein sour grapes do not dangle in the out-of-reach boundaries of our existence. To work oneself into a fury is worse folly. I have spent many a day shouting at them, but sour grapes are not to be frightened. They looked just as smiling after my scolding as before, and my rage has affected only myself.

"Rise superior to such weakness," was the pompous suggestion of a neighbor, and I immediately

### SOUR GRAPES

thought of a remark made by a much more valued acquaintance to the effect that "the skunk as he ought to be, ain't in these woods."

Even my learned and proud neighbor is not the "skunk as he ought to be," although he thinks he is. A trifle of mephitic odor still clings to his skirts. There are sour grapes in his scholastic pathway. He fails to attract the crowd that flocks to hear every new-comer, and so loftily mumbles, "Fit audience, though few," but cannot conceal the fact that he is envious.

Sour grapes are hanging in mocking array around all our Elysian fields, so why not accept them philosophically? Put the suggestion into practice and be honest about the result—if you can. Satan, I believe, has ever been too busy to bother about mere lies; sour grapes, rather, are responsible for the birth of mendacity.

Turn now in thought, as I was recently forced to do in fact, and consider inaccessible grapes. Never a brighter and more crisp October morning, and frosted fox-grapes just out of reach. If we may judge by odor only, these were not sour, but of honeyed excellence; sweet, perhaps, to the point of

cloying; centering in themselves all the charms of a long, fruitful summer; May blossoms, June roses, midsummer's ripening sunshine and now nature's final touch, October's frost. Grapes such as these before me and as well try to reach a sunset. How our boasted greatness dwindles at times! Not one grape for me, and there is a jolly, tantalizing bluejay that has every one of them at his mercy. Of course the proper thing, as man long since decided, is to turn away, affect indifference and say the grapes are sour; but they are not. This, however, matters but little; it soothes our vanity to force a belief in petty lies. The grapes are not for me unless I can outwit nature, who hung them at a tree-top. Why not say so? is to ask a puzzle. I certainly shall make no supreme effort to reach them. The prize is not worth the risk of myself dangling from a tree-top, and I am very comfortable here on the sod with a cushion of moss for my head, if I get weary. The gist of the matter is, are not pleasure and profit to be derived from the inaccessible? I see and smell the grapes, and have not eyes and nose sufficient prominence to make their delectation worthy effort? We delight in roses without eating

### SOUR GRAPES

them, so why not grapes that are out of reach? Nature sets up no notice to "keep off the grass," but we pay the penalty if our common sense does not detect the propriety of keeping within bounds. Bear in mind this world was not evolved for man's sole benefit, but that he is only a part of a stupendous, complex whole. If we do this, what happens is intelligible; otherwise it is not. From this point of view there is no turning or shadow of turning. Nature is not communicative unless we tease her continually, and one of the few plain statements she makes is that above mentioned.

My inaccessible grapes are enjoyable.

"How yours, if you cannot reach them?" asks my companion, contemptuously.

"By virtue of my eyes and nose," I replied, showing no irritation. Surely, I think, the object that caters to two senses is not beneath notice; nor is this case an instance of mere objective observation. I can see the blue jay that screams its delight, and the free, wild bird in turn calls attention to a crimson creeper that has twined round and round the trunk of a birch near-by, and again, I am directed to the sky beyond with a cloud as white as

a winter's snowbank. Inaccessible grapes, but not inaccessible nature, if content to see, hear, smell—to breathe October's frosty air and forget the trifling fact that the grapes must go untasted.

In our eagerness to cross a brook we are apt to forget the good offices of the stepping-stones. The frost-bitten grape, even if now mere wrinkled skin and rattling seeds, is worthy of all regard if by its presence it attracts the living glories of the autumn day about it; and I know not where else to look with greater confidence for the passing birds that now are drifting southward and happily greet every grape in a cheerful way that makes me envious. It is something to be remembered when the passing bird says "Good morning" as it flits by you. brings you nearer to nature in a most enchanting way. For once you feel of some importance. The politician who condescends to nod to me, hoping such brief recognition will win my vote, never magnifies my importance, but exaggerates his own. wandering minstrel of the woods that warbles, "Fair day, good sir," exalts me. At last some creature has discovered that I am somebody. After such an experience I return from a ramble in the

### SOUR GRAPES

October woods ready to take up life's burdens with becoming grace. This happening, I am moved to say of the inaccessible grapes, not "sour," but sacred.

Grapes may linger half the winter through, but not so the varied features of our autumn days. All save the bare outline of the outlook, fixed hills and flowing landscape, is transient. Few birds stay half the day, and perhaps none over a night. The host hurries by like the crowd on Broadway, and we catch only a glimpse now and then of some old acquaintance. So, to realize what is occurring, our senses must be set to the new order. No nesting birds for deliberate study now, and so the transient traveler passing by, nodding to the grapes if not to you, has not received all the attention that is desirable. It is down in the books, sandwiched between anatomical data and museum details, "transient in autumn"; as if this told the whole story. I question if there is a single bird that wings its way from one end to the other of New Jersey and never halts for an hour or two in one of the fairest spots on the face of the earth. There may be such according to the ornithologists, but then these

men are not infallible; they only think so. Bird-life has been longer upon earth than has humanity, so I am moved to say that we have a trace, through heredity, of the bird-nature in us, and possibly it is due to this that the aged among ourselves love to ruminate, living over again the dead summers of their departed years. I think this may have come from the no less suggestive feature of bird-life, for never an October passes but, when the woods are quiet or only our own awkward footsteps stir the crisp leaves in our path, the migrating bird recalls the summer of the dying year; has vision, it may be, of the brilliant May and leafy June in far-off mountain forests, and is moved to repeat the old story of undying love to his credulous mate. If the bird at the time, as happened when last I heard it, rested in a tangled vine, far out of reach, I blessed the wrinkled grapes for staying that "transient" bird.

Of necessity we must be utilitarian at times, and facts force themselves upon us without a hint of their real significance. I cannot tell at this moment why I wish to be satisfied on such a subject, but other grapes, unlike in some respects those before me now, do not find place in the text-books, or else

#### SOUR GRAPES

I cannot read aright. To question Gray is to proclaim yourself an idiot, but some of the grapes I gather year after year are not typical Vitis labrusca. They are not mushy, nor blue-black, but tenderskinned, firm and ready to eat in August and recognized in the house as not "fox-grapes," because the jelly made from them is of a very different flavor. At home we say "sugar-grape," but there is no Vitis saccharina in Gray or Britton. It can scarcely be that this variation is due to difference of soil, for I find the "fox" and "sugar" grape growing very near each other, and the two forms of the one species, as I suppose they are, are held as quite distinct by all my neighbors. I am reminded, in all this, of the fact that we have but one Baltimore oriole, wood-thrush and cat-bird, but if we classed them by their music as I have always done grapes by their flavor the "species" of these birds would be bewildering. I heard an ornithologist exclaim, "What's that?" when a song-sparrow in my garden sang in its own, peculiar way. I was not surprised. I did not accept the bird's identity when I saw it first in the act of singing.

There is one fox-grape vine on my neighbor's

hillside that bears fruit significantly larger than the maximum diameter given by either Gray or Britton; berries fully an inch across, sweet to cloying and not very musky. The juice is very syrupy and suggests the concentration of the swamp, rank growths of fern and skunk-cabbage, moss and decaying treetrunks; the juice, I fancy, the Indians loved to drink, warming their blood before battle. I give way to the uppermost whim when I eat these grapes, and it is generally a feeling that I am a savage for the day, and so linger under the sky, trying to forget that I ever saw a roof or tamely crept beneath it. One can do all this, if alone, on a crisp, October morning, and not be set down as a fool by one's neighbors. Never even hint at nonsense when in company, and likewise, to get the full benefit of a morning stroll while yet the frost lingers where the shadows fall, go alone.

Never, in contemplating wild grapes, whether near at hand or inaccessible, sweet or sour, forget the vine that bears them. How often it happens that the minor details are neglected when we face the majestic features of our outlook. Not an oak or elm but we give heed to it, and sometimes do not

#### SOUR GRAPES

so much as see the little vine that rooted near it has found attachment as high in air as the tree's topmost twig. Graceful as a serpent, it has climbed to the outer air and finds as much sunlight as the old oak's broad crown. Both tree and vine are fixed, but the rigidity of the one is replaced by the flexibility of the other, and the difference is well worth noting. The ship's mast and the rigging are here in these woods where vines reach tree-tops and are as easily swayed as ropes not over-taut.

The probable age of our largest oaks or other trees is often asked, and the same question might well be put as to the vine. When these are six or eight inches in diameter and about four or even five hundred feet long, they antedate the coming of the white man. One vine, on an island in the river, certainly does this. Something more important than the maximum age of a vine, which may as readily be one thousand as one hundred years, is whether it climbs certain trees and never burdens others. Of course, one's own observations go for little. The professional contradictor is always at your elbow. Still I venture to add that no grape-vine has come under my notice growing up a beech

or tulip-tree; and the oak, sassafras and cedar are usually the natural arbors over which the vine trails. Possibly the beech and tulip-trees have barks too smooth for the tendrils of the young vine, but I do not know anything about it. So, too, the effect of a vine upon the sustaining tree is worthy of more careful study than it appears to have received. So long as I can remember a frost grape-vine has been intertwined with the branches of a very old cedar. The lower branches of the tree have been dead for many years, and now the top shows but a pitiful tuft of green when the leaves of the vine are fallen. The cedar has at last become overburdened, and is about to succumb to the weight it has long borne. There is something very like human experience in all this, and after a casual glance at the unhappy cedar, I am glad to turn to a dead birch over which the Virginia creeper, now brilliantly red, has crept. It had the decency to wait until the birch was dead before making use of it, but the credit of always waiting does not belong to this or any vine.

No pretty stories of old grape-vines have come down to us, and for this omission as well as many

#### SOUR GRAPES

others we have abundant cause to roundly abuse the straight-laced Quakerism of colonial days. As children they had grape-vine swings, and when of larger growth sat on vine-embowered seats and talked as sillily as people do now under the same conditions, and yet we have neither a tragedy nor a comedy handed down. No wonder the historians do up the whole region in a paragraph. Nothing handed down; but the loss is less to those willing to let our old grape-vines tell their own story.

A little brook that zigzags across many upland fields has worked its way to the low-lying meadows, not by tumbling headlong over a precipice, but by working deeper and deeper into the soil as it neared the cliff, and now has a ravine forty feet deep and one hundred wide through which to leisurely ripple during the summer, or, for variety's sake, tumultuously rush, after a shower. But summer or winter, or when the fresh, green leaves are growing or, carried by autumn winds, these same leaves choke the channel, it is always an interesting brook, and one that has yet to be scrutinized more closely by geologists before they write their final reports on the history of the Delaware valley.

12

So much for the brook at the bottom of the ravine, and now a word concerning the vegetation of its precipitous sides. Of the hundreds of trees here there is not one that is large, but many that are old as we count years; a walnut, for instance, that has not perceptibly increased in girth for twenty-five years, and which is, I know, a tree of the preceding century. These oaks, beeches, ashes, locusts and gum trees make, collectively, a pretty strip of woodland of small area but so complete in all that goes to form a forest the rambler forgets that cultivated fields are within easy reach. With attention drawn to the brook and the trees that overhang it, the outer bounds are not considered. Whatever the time of year the atmosphere here is not that of the open fields or meadows; unless very cold there is that "woodsy" smell that is more refreshing than the shade of a single tree. This peculiar odor and the steady "hum-m-m" of running waters quickly restore the jaded nerves, and the ravine is recognized as Nature's sanatorium. Lingering here, if but for a brief half-hour, we are sure to single out some one object of interest and let all else act as background. It may be

## SOUR GRAPES

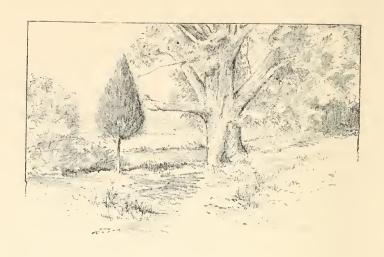
the early violets wakened by the first breath of spring, or more pretentious bloom of June's long days, but now, from all other glories of October's days, I turn to the long vines that have reached the light above the forest roof and sway gently in the breeze that hurries down the glen. When the first vine grew, and when it cast loose from the sustaining tree-trunk to swing in mid air, it boots it not to conjecture; but of this we can be well assured, there are vines here now that have seen stranger sights and witnessed fiercer battles than take place in these days of the infinitely little. Within the shadows of the trees in this ravine my friend is now digging deep in the earth and finding the bones of bears, wolves and of the cougar, but now even the wildcat has been exterminated. The fiercer fauna of the Indian's time we can only think of; the wolf is no longer heard and no elk now browses in the forest or meadows. These we can only picture to ourselves, and never again have actually before us. There is no denying that this little corner of creation has been more attractive than it is to-day. We can not say the grapes were sour then. If they were, then they are worse than sour now.

If no wild-cat, even, crouches in the gnarly oaktree's arms, there are squirrels, and to see one of them run half the length of a swaying vine and dash to safe quarters as a hawk swoops by is to be closer to nature than often happens. The blessed wildness in us, the savage instinct that we aim to keep out of sight, comes to the fore, and manhood is realized; sparkling like champagne, and not like stale beer, flat and unprofitable. It takes us a step backward toward the primitive man of glacial time who once dwelt here, braving arctic cold and knowing the mastodon in the great coniferous forests that clothed the hills, the musk-ox on the ice-clad plains and the walrus in the deep, wide bay. To recall these is as a tonic that braces the nerves as can no drug in the apothecary's shop.

The wind may die away; silence reign from end to end of the long ravine, but before we lapse into dreamy wonderment of what has been, the wandering crows will come and the screaming blue-jay return. Harsh, all their cries, yet not ill-fitting to the time of year, for surely the warbled hopes and despair of birds in love, the poetry of May, has no place in these frosty days.

## SOUR GRAPES

And yet not every creature because it is October is stirred to some blood-thirsty deed, or thinks only of the struggle for bare existence. A songsparrow, at this moment, argues for cheerfulness, singing "Please, please, please, please, please-please-to-listen-now!" and followed promptly by a crested tit, whose "T' sweet here!" dispels all doubt and proves that October is as lovable as May. What if the summer birds are gone; if we no longer hear that magically melodic song, the weird, uplifting hymn of the wood-thrush? What if the leaves are dropping and the scattered grapes of all the vines about us are out of reach? The songs of what few birds are here make life worth living. Let the sweetness of your temper neutralize the acidity of sour grapes as the glory of the bitter-sweet robs the vine's apparent death of its repulsiveness. 181



A Fence-rail Fancy

IF OUR word "vagary" has more or less near cousinship to "larifari," or syllables without sense, then was my noontide hour spent in vain, as I can bring myself to consider the disjointed thinking as I lingered about a pile of old fence-rails as "vagaries" only, and nothing more dignified or important.

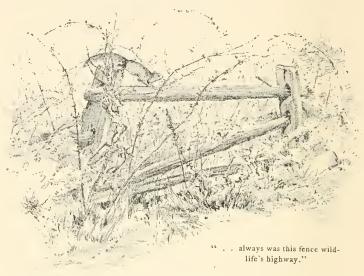
Homely as was the old rail fence of other days, every panel thereof had a history no skill of man has ever yet been able to worthily record, and, coming to less complex objects, a single rail, whether

#### A FENCE - RAIL FANCY

the entire trunk of a tapering cedar or split from a chestnut log, has its own history that teems, perhaps, with those colonial times of which so often we say a great deal and know exceedingly little. Be all this as it may, I would now rather go back to the pile of old rails in the field corner than rest for the time in any kickshaw-crowded parlor. It was honest news that the rail pile had to tell, and this we do not always hear between four walls.

In the vacation days of August, the lazy month, when comfortable idleness is more desired than riches, it is good luck beyond reasonable hope to find a novel point of view. I think I found it in a pile of fence-rails. Not one of these rails but was part of a living tree a good deal more than a century ago; that fact counts for something. Not one but bears evidences of strange experiences since, and this concerns us now, when on natural history bent. The fence rail is the highway of more forms of animal life than any living tree, and often can boast of more travelers than the ground beneath or air above it. A rail fence, with its grassy or weedy angles, is a wild country, and saying this, we say everything.

It was not so long ago that this pile of rails reached across the wide field in orderly disarray, and all save the topmost one of each panel was hidden during August by weeds that overtopped half the little cedars and squatty sassafras saplings



that were struggling to become trees; stout weeds that boasted of storm-defying strength and waved majestically in the passing breeze until effectually snubbed by frost. Then and always was this fence wild-life's highway. I have seen the squirrels, weasels, mice and larger mammals, more rarely, pass

#### A FENCE-RAIL FANCY

along it, and many a "Bob-white" that hid, at last, by squatting close to the bottom rail. Here, in midwinter, were brave-hearted sparrows, and in February, when the sunshine hinted of spring, were warbling

bluebirds, and I
thought that half
the glory of the
fields would be
gone if the fence
were ever taken
away; but the
weather-beaten, lichencoated rails, piled in the
corner, have drawn unto
them all the good things
of the dear, old days.

In mid-December last I often
lingered long on the sunny side "...a 'Bob-white' ...cl
of the rail pile. The sun's rays
centered there and it seemed like summer. Not
for a moment did I find myself alone. Even
insect life was active. Now, in August, it is the
shady side that I find more comfortable, and the
wild-life of the field is like-minded. The birds

come and go continually, and what busy creatures are the wrens that thread its tangled maze, running to and fro like frightened mice. Song-sparrows also have a fancy for the deep, dark recesses near its base, and after each exploratory tour these birds mount the topmost rail and sing exultantly. In vain do I peer into the long, narrow spaces between the rails. I can see nothing distinctly, yet I know that here are a hundred homes of creatures as diverse as birds, mice and spiders.

Strange it seems, when all that makes the world so entertaining is about me in abundance, that I should turn with such eagerness to these fence-rails and consider them exclusively. To pass from natural history to humanity is perhaps excusable,—tastes differ; but to ignore a singing bird and give heed to a fence-rail savors of absurdity. Many men of many minds, and in August one is seldom studiously disposed. Vagaries assume importance when idle fancy is the limit of exertion. Here is a cedar rail, and the tall, tapering cedar-tree that still is a feature of the landscape was once to be numbered among the more prominent characteristics of old New Jersey. The level fields were then cedar-

## A FENCE-RAIL FANCY

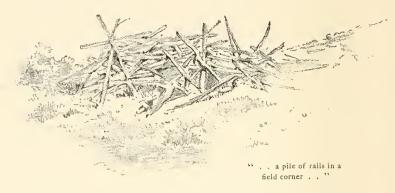
dotted plains. Peter Kalm mentions them as growing (1748) in dry, poor soil, and very slowly increasing in girth; usually scattered about singly, but sometimes "standing together in clusters." Perhaps the latter marked an abandoned Indian corn-field. I think this probable.

Kalm mentions a cedar, eighteen inches in diameter, that was two hundred and fifty years old. If he was not in error, the tree now in sight is quite two centuries old, yet does not stand out prominently. Still, close examination of the tree shows evidence of age. Little cedars like little men ever grow old and ugly. Mere size counts for nothing.

This particular cedar rail was cut more than a century ago, and the tree of which it was a part then was old; yet the country was settled. This now fast-decaying rail points, as it seems to me, to the still living trees of its kind, and I am closer linked to times long ago. The odor of cedars carries me back to chests and wainscoting of that wood, the workmanship of colonial carpenters. Old houses now are few, and rarer still to find them unmarred by modern furnishings, but a good, old-fashioned atmosphere clings to even this old

cedar rail, and a whiff thereof conjures up a house I well remember.

But what of a chestnut rail? I am sitting now on one that has been deftly split from some stately tree in the dry, upland woods. I know this because the grain is straight and there is not a trace of a branch ever having grown from it. Close-grained



and so firm, too, the rail came from the main trunk and not from some far out-reaching limb, the squirrels' highway when October ripened the nuts.

Peter Kalm, already quoted, makes scanty reference to the chestnut-tree, yet I cannot believe it was not in his day, as now, conspicuous beyond nearly every other growth. Huge white oaks in Quaker meeting-yards and chestnuts of as great

# · A FENCE-RAIL FANCY

size amidfields or along country roads are known to everybody, and though there were more forests than open land in Indian days, I am surprised that Kalm should have seen no chestnut-trees that strongly impressed him. Not far away still stands a splendid tree of this kind. It is seven feet in diameter, and in flourishing condition. How old? I often ask, and get various estimates. A common reply is that of a hundred years. People are given to mentioning this lapse of time as the climax of antiquity. It is of little significance in the age of trees. I own a rose-bush nearly that old, and lilac bushes that are older. The chestnut I spoke of is probably in its third century, and well advanced in it, too.

The old rail fence had to give way to modern improvements, so often a sad marring of a lovely landscape, but as a pile of rails in a field corner it has had its eventful little day. The farmer has been kept at arm's length, so to speak, and patient nature here resumed her sway. Scarcely a known weed but has found a root-hold here, and many have bloomed in a sweet, wild way more charming than the pretentious flowers of a trim garden.

Bright roses attracted the butterflies, and the gaudy trumpet-creeper brought the humming-birds from far and near. Later, when the cool autumn days have come and these old fence-rails are firewood, as I sit before the andirons what glorious pictures of the overfull seasons, winter, spring and summer will float before me. Better that in this vague way we live over again some hours that are gone than not to live them over again at all.





Before the Rain

SLOWLY the threatening masses of ashen clouds had increased in extent until their outer edges overlapped and the sun struggled in vain to pierce the veil that shut it out. The shadows that had fallen far athwart the fields were gone. A light so clear that distances were shortened filled the landscape. This, in turn, was followed by a condition of atmosphere that gave an unimpeded path to every sound. The wood-thrush really far off seemed very near, and the twittering of smaller

birds was not a trivial accompaniment of rustling leaves, but reached me in the full dignity of a simple song.

It is possible, notwithstanding all its merits, to overrate the sunshine. When it is so pronounced that we are prone to deepen the forehead's wrinkles and look between half-closed eyelids, blinking like owls, then there is too much of that blessed light that is alike in fact and fancy the very soul of life. The simple truth is there may be too much light to see distinctly, and no object but is viewed unsatisfactorily, if not actually distorted, by such noonday glare as we very often have in midsummer. Birds usually avoid it, and fittingly; it suits best the tiger-beetles and snakes; veritable fiery dragons at such times and in such places. Many a Desert of Sahara may we find in the sandy pastures and in those pebbly, fruitless fields where thistles rejoice and dragon-flies are ecstatic—though why, it is hard to tell; but this is not the time for sunburnt thoughts, and the cloudy actualities never have been accorded their due.

"Too dull a day for an outing" is a too-familiar phrase. Whether or not our opinion coincides with

# BEFORE THE RAIN

that of animate nature is another matter. The points of view of animal life and of ours are necessarily different, and it is theirs rather than ours that should influence us. We must take wild-life's nature upon us to see not only it, but as it sees. Crouch like a cat lying in wait for a sparrow and we will see sparrows as they do not appear to an ordinary mortal's eyes. I venture to say that more novelty is down in naturalists' note-books gathered just before the rain than in hours afterwards, when the sun flooded earth and sky with an intense, bewildering light.

I am writing now in a deep ravine, where the century-old oaks and a wilderness of lesser growths partly conceal but do not shut out the hum of a rapid brook. Unlike the rustling of foliage, flowing water, however agitated, seems not to drown those other sounds in nature to which we so eagerly listen. Indeed, it appears to intensify them. I have heard all the lower notes of the wood-thrush very distinctly above the roar of a high dam. The wrens that nested in the old mill were always plainly heard,—as plainly as those particularly wise birds of their kind that yearly spend their summer near my home and

13

dart through the open windows to explore the sad monotony of a human habitation.

These are the actualities of the present moment. I notice, first, a fretful tree-toad hidden in some safe nook overhead, dolorously croaking its satisfaction, now that rain is in the air. Throughout the sunny days it has been grumbling, so it was said, because the rain seemed in the far future,—an example of the inconsistency of ordinary folk-lore. It is a pleasant sound, whatever its true interpretation; an uncultivated sound, suggesting nature following out her own plans. On the ordinary farm freedom from man's interference is not always found. A tree-toad may be sitting on the garden gate or in the rose-bush growing against the house, but in spite of this, the croaking is to me a sound that smacks of the lonely nooks that defy the plowshare,-places wherein we may return to good, old times such as figure in the day-dreams of our idle hours.

Sound in nature, to be thoroughly enjoyed, must be suggestive of more than the creature that produces it, and the greatest delight arises when it is associated with locality. Then is given to it a

# BEFORE THE RAIN

transporting power; the sound itself, or one suggesting it, at once carries you back to the time, place and circumstances about which cling so much that is fondly cherished.

I hear also a wood-frog's note, much less distinct, but unmistakable; a shady, damp, matted-leaf sound; for this is a creature of moisture rather than open water. I have often chased them, marveling at their leaping powers, and do not recollect their diving into a brook or basin of a spring to escape. Such are their last resorts, I take it. There are frogs of several kinds in the open meadows, and we are apt to consider them as too commonplace for inspection—a great mistake on any rambler's part—but a wood-frog will be sure to attract attention. Trim built and graceful as a fern, it fits perfectly with the surroundings. There is nothing lacking. Occasionally I have seen a human being that suggested a wood-frog. This I mean as a compliment, and one that can seldom be paid.

Small matters in themselves are the buzzings and hummings of insects, but when a big beetle is abroad by day and goes about banging his head against tree trunks, or an early cricket hints of the

mer sunshine, we have brought to our attention facts not less momentous than if a wildcat screams. Right at hand I find evidence of real tragedy: a luckless grasshopper, perhaps hurrying to shelter, has impaled himself. Small parts of a colossal whole, be it remembered, and when remembered there is territory about us everywhere worthy of exploration.

"... a luckless grasshopper, .."

Just as there is a marked, all-pervading quiet immediately preceding the rain, so had there been a lull in bird-song; but this is now broken. A wood-thrush has perched directly overhead, and not twenty yards away is another of its kind. Both are singing with equal sweetness, but quite differently. "The-o-ree," says one. "Tut, not at all!" replies the other. Let them argue. I am thankful that their singing is a fact.

Does the singing of one bird inspire others? It would appear so, and yet it would be rash to go farther and say that birds take pleasure in the songs of others. Be it all as it may, these other birds, and the ravine is full of them, join now in the tide of song that sweeps down the valley, rippling as mer-

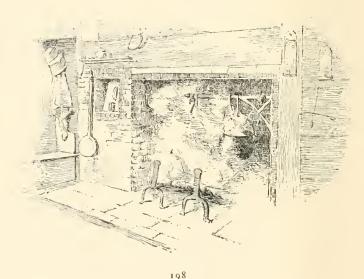
# BEFORE THE RAIN

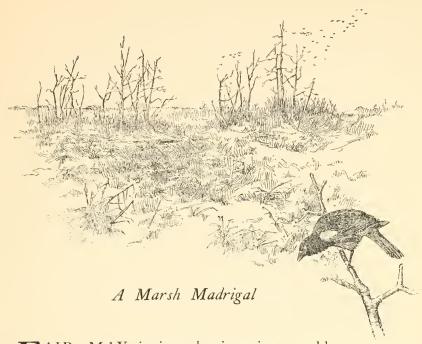
rily among the leaves as the sparkling water below laughs over the pebbles in its bed. Seven kinds of warblers that I recognize, and one that I am not sure of, and four finches, each an excellent singer, have just passed by, and not an instant but is music-laden. Unusual activity prevails; cat-birds and the oven-bird perhaps the most perturbed of all the throng. I fancy the tenor of all bird-thought now is the near necessity of shelter. This seems the more probable as many birds are coming in from the adjoining fields, reminding me of the haymakers of old times. How they ran to the shelter of the hillside oaks when a shower passed their way! Just where the birds find protection I could never determine, but as those trees that are the most densely leaved do not always most effectually turn the drops aside, I trust rather to a beech or linden than to an oak or cedar.

A warning gust came sweeping by just now, and the pattering of raindrops is the one, prevailing sound. Every bird is silent, and it is time that I, too, should seek shelter, but I hasten not to my home. The old workshop is a trifle nearer and its roof is tight. This was once the kitchen; best-

loved room of my boyhood, and thankful am I now that my grandfather clung to the old ways almost to the last. In this old room, then kitchen and now abandoned to more prosaic use, I caught the spirit of colonial days and heard tales of the old times told by their actors.

It is raining now, and to the music of pattering raindrops upon the roof I go back two score of years. Again the old, open fireplace is in its glory; again I am a boy. Would it all were true!





RAIR MAY invites the impatient world to laugh, and grim October bids the world to frown, but the melancholy that Bryant sang is never mine. When Nature is angry I laugh at her; when gay, laugh with her. Even if there is frost only in the mountains, there is frostiness in the air in the valleys, and to-day the leaves are falling. Down every shaded wood-path one by one they fall, and every one yet green as in leafy June. There is, this year, no crimson and gold that poets

rave about, but summer's single tint. A carnival of colored leaves might have stayed my steps, but green leaves slowly dropping was all too tame.

I felt the hot blood of my hunter-days course in my veins, and so hurried to the marsh, where my little world is yet wild and a savage may be at ease. The red-winged blackbirds were before me; not ten, but ten hundred, and all rejoicing! It was not the song of early summer that they sang, but, to me, a merrier note; an expression of satisfaction in the sterner mood of nature, when the gusty wind troubled the wide expanse and dotted old Crosswicks with little whitecaps.

It is well sometimes to particularize, and a mere unannotated list of the good things spread before us is appetizing. It was so to-day. I could not tell which way it were better to turn, to the right or left. The red-wings were at my right hand, and many a slender branch bent with its burden of busy feet and wings. There was great rejoicing, but over what? Here the rambler at once feels his limitations. He is brought face to face with a fact he cannot fathom, and finally turns away, theorizing until his fine-spun thoughts take on the garb of

# A MARSH MADRIGAL

truth. But simple, singing blackbirds are enough in themselves, and it is well to let other senses and faculties than purely mental ones have the upper hand. Listen to the music; heed the marsh madrigal of a cold, October day, without wondering why it happens to be here and what it means to the birds. Be something of a savage when with savage nature. There are times when intellect is in the way of rational enjoyment. Crouch among frost-bitten bulrushes for half a day that you may see an otter and you will have appetite to eat raw meat when you come back to the camp-fire.

My red-winged blackbirds were the playthings of the wind, and never have I seen a more beautiful sight than the rising, falling, turning upon edge, pitching and twisting of this close-ranked flock; and never for an instant silent. Nature repeated her May-day jubilee, and for green leaves there were sparkling waters; no mean exchange. Cold, glittering waves that leaped against every projecting stump and the sides of my boat; heartless, rattling, clattering waves, pitiless as a serpent, yet very beautiful. Equally cold and savage the gusty wind that rushed through the forest and swept down into the narrow

valley of the creek, driving the chilling spray into my face; yet never out of sight or hearing of the congregated birds, and what was a little discomfort while I could listen to that marsh madrigal? A thousand blithe hearts and tuneful voices put the timid rambler to shame. Chilly and despairing a moment ago, but a second thought can quicken a sluggish pulse at times, and I am braver now, thanks to the blackbirds clustered in the marsh. My friends proved fleeter awing than I in my boat, but it is a rare occurrence to be quite alone. There is more than one sparrow that comes to the water's edge, and bright eyes count for something, even if they go with a silent tongue, but my swamp-sparrow was not silent; it chirped cheerfully, and a pleasant word, if only a single one, can gladden more effectively than a long discourse. Interpret a mere chirp as a welcome, and brevity is the soul of music as well as of wit.

An angrier blast than any before sweeps the wide waste of waters, and my sparrow leaves me, but still I am not alone. A brave muskrat swims across the stream, and, marking his course, I discover his dome-like house already built, a month or more

#### A MARSH MADRIGAL

before I should have looked for it. Are we going to have a cold winter? Endless fairy tales about animals' weather-wisdom are extant. We can interpret as we like what we see and be sure of finding somebody to uphold us in our conclusions, so at loggerheads are all these entertaining enthusiasts, the professors of folk-lore, who, with knit brows, abundant emphasis and manifold exhibition of misdirected energy, analyze, classify, dissect and perhaps trinomially label some senseless saying of a harmless fool. My muskrat entered his home, and, not invited, I did not follow. He knows no more of what is coming than I do. It no longer does to say they may be gifted with a peculiar prophetic power and prepare for the future. A pretty idea, but alas! deadly statistics scatter the fancy as the autumn winds scatter the pretty clouds.

The blackbirds have returned. In the almost leafless branches of a gnarly gum-tree they have congregated again, and singing as merrily as if no wind troubled the water or bent low the withered grass beneath them. If not singing, whistling to keep up their courage, then it is a lively discussion as to what next to do; perhaps whether or not to

203

"A brave muskrat swims across the stream, . .

migrate. Their summer home is not an unsatisfactory one in winter, for when all the marsh is icebound I find them here, not a few stragglers, but many, and still they sing, scattering abroad their chilled notes that ring and tinkle like breaking icicles. A marsh, even in January, is not the portal of inferno. A wandering duck in the upper air or a mouse in the dead grass under foot bars the world against the curse of solitude. Or you may meet a hunter on his rounds, some quaint character who is never averse to being interviewed if he can do all the talking. And what strange tales he tells! The world turns back to prehistoric time, and every sapling is a giant oak, every rustling, dead leaf the dreaded footstep of a lurking foe; monsters come and go as the hunter tells of what has been when he was young; of clouds of geese and ducks that blackened the broad creek; of otters, coal-black minks and a fierce wildcat that scarred his face and arms. Life is worth living if only to hear such tales, and as I listen I long to be young again and honestly regret that ever I had so much as heard of any town.

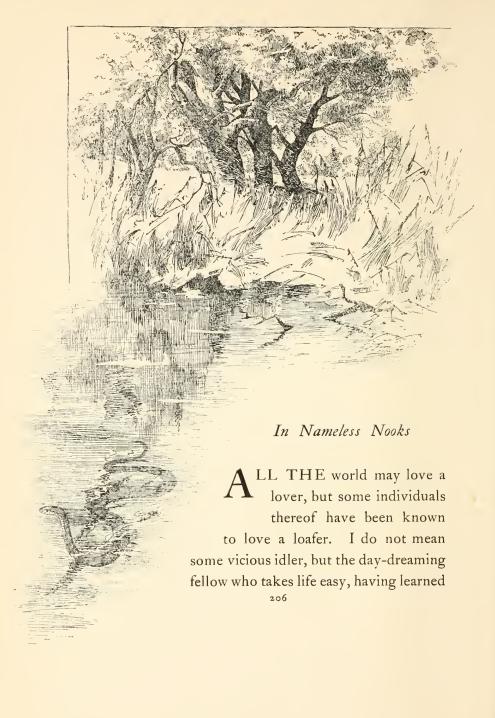
The blackbirds still are singing, but the air has

## A MARSH MADRIGAL

room for other songs than theirs, and the whistle of the cardinal comes from the nearest thicket. No bird loves the marshland more, and as one that haunts such spots he deserves closer study. I have seen them jerk their tails as nervously as a sandpiper or a water-thrush when walking among the bared roots of old trees, when the outgoing tide exposed wide reaches of soft, black mud.

Fitting well with the whistle of our winter redbird is the plaintive warble of white-throated sparrows, which seem to say, all day, "Dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming!" and this is precisely what these dear birds do. A marsh madrigal is no myth.





## IN NAMELESS NOOKS

the art of arts, that of doing without. A cultivated savage—not necessarily a contradiction—is very near to the perfection of manhood. It means being rid of cruelty, or comparatively so. Total freedom from cruelty is the climax of human excellence, which is but an aspiration. The world is not perfect as a whole, or why forever changing? Accepting this, why look for such condition in any of its parts? Probably the nearest approach to it is in the adaptation of insects to the perpetuation of plant life. There are flowers, too, so exquisitely evolved that they realize—or is it mere electrical machinery?—when the weather is likely to change, and turn from the sky to the earth to protect themselves from pelting raindrops. Reading the weather as no man can, they are prompt also to look directly at the sun the moment the storm is over. Man's brain is very wonderful, but not so much can be said for his body. It suffers when compared with the delicate framework of many of the lower animals.

Occasionally I have met with a strictly outdoor man. Such people are never disappointing, though we will not find them all of equal value. In my experience they have opened up some new view

always, and made my own walk more entertaining and instructive. There is always one such crude philosopher in every village, and I care not as little as he does that the good folk of the neighborhood hold him as a "ne'er-do-well" because he spends his days in closer association with fish and frogs than with field or factory; or even less practical, curious to know the purpose of the mottled leaves of the skunk-cabbage that even in February begin to beautify the marshland. For my own part I would rather know the reason of this mottling of a leaf than know how to earn a dollar. One of these village idlers who knew the marshland as Thoreau knew Concord, drew my attention to this plant in such an entertaining way that I have since lingered longer where they grow than before that day and find something more in every nameless nook than I did some years ago. Nameless, indeed, but not unworthy names. It is only the commonplace mind that considers any locality as beneath its notice, for where is the spot on earth not the home of at least one fact not in our possession until we have visited it, and not then unless we have eyes to see. It is not more wise to despise a pool because

# IN NAMELESS NOOKS

we cannot reach the ocean than to despise the earth because we cannot reach the sun. Do not become dissatisfied until you have exhausted your own dooryard. This has never yet been done. The labors of Hercules were as child's play in comparison. The over-ambitious fool is the biggest fool of them all, and the world is full of them. The rambler that would do justice to his home must be a microcosmic philosopher in so far that he must see how the world works as a whole from close study of the tiny spot before his eyes. The trees of the tropics and the stunted willow that ventures to the very border of eternal ice tell the same story of the laws of growth. If we may judge from books and lectures, the farthest traveled have not always told us the most news.

Is the world always so much more wonderful elsewhere than at home? I do not believe it. This is a phase of unbelief that makes for happiness. It is as exhilarating as unwavering faith, the key-note of content. In "Kenilworth" it is asked, Who would listen to a thrush when the nightingale is singing? That depends. I certainly prefer my thrush to your nightingale. Why murder content

14

by envying your neighbor? The splendor of the homely spots I love outranks the splendor of the world at large. My geese are not swans, but excellent geese, and I purpose keeping them so. My ears are better fitted to the music nature has provided at my home than for the music heard as a stranger in a strange land. My only desire when I cross the river is to recross it. If nature misplaced me it was her fault, not mine, but I have had no reason yet to believe that she was in error.

Many a bright morning of the passing year I have been abroad and made my frequent goal a nameless pool in the meadows. It is best known to the cows and is familiar to the boy that comes for them at sunset; then in order, as rated by our knowledge, is myself. The landlord does not know of the pool's existence. He must be dragged from it, half drowned, before its presence will be remembered. I place the cow-boy before myself, for he it was who told me of its wonders, and how he had speared with a pitchfork a huge carp that he found there. As to the landlord, strangely enough, he has overlooked the tall hickories that shut the pool from view, and my joy of lingering about it is

marred only by the fear that his longing for a few more dollars may lead to the trees' destruction.

When I was last at the pool a common impulse seemed to have taken hold of wild-life and brought it hither. Mere cataloguing would have made a busy day for many specialists. I know that I was busy enough merely as an idle spectator, and better now plunge into the thick of the fray than speak at all of that which happened during my going and coming. It is enough to say that the sun rose with every promise of a perfect day, and that the promise was kept. To attempt more by way of description is dangerous. It is within the power of any one to sit before a canvas, and even to pick up a brush and thrust a thumb through the hole in the palette, but to lay on color aright is within the skill of only one in a million. So, too, the elaborate wordiness that clothes a simple fact is not high art. Many have picked up the pen that fell from Thoreau's hand and have, or should have, laid it down in despair.

My neighbor's nameless meadow-pool is a pretty spot, and, though nameless, it has a history. It may be hinted here that if the history of humble things were better known that of great things would some-

times suffer, for much humbleness is worthy of exaltation and some greatness merits placing on a lower level. But a few years ago stamping cows, frantic with the torturing bites of hellish flies, broke the stiff meadow-sod and crumbled the withered grass to dust so fine that every passing breeze carried it away with the lighter particles of the loosened sand. The new-born hollow caught the passing shower. The little puddle was soon dry ground again, and day after day was deepened by the feet of the restless cows. Before the summer was over the underlying hard-pan had been reached and the autumn rains made among the clustered hickories a permanent pool. The great, twisted roots of the trees gave graceful outlines to it, and the first freshet of our rainy season sloped the banks and gave the place those final touches that take away all newness. When next I saw the spot, one bright, May morning, the sparkling water, reflecting the pink azalea that bent over it, was as clear and in place as any trickling stream of a hill-foot spring. The earth changes slowly as a whole, but often very quickly and completely in a small way. During the second winter the ice cut a deep channel from the pool to

the creek, and animal and vegetal life coming in from thence changed its whole character. Spatterdock and arrow-head, pickerel-weed and river-weed, duck-meat and algæ are now here. With this aquatic flora came many forms of life: shells, crayfish, minnows and insects more bloodthirsty than India's tigers. Then another change, the ice of a succeeding winter dammed up the little channel, and only land-locked water-life could hold its own; and so unto this day has the nameless pool remained. To-day it is at best but a shallow scooping out of the uncertain soil wherein the summer rains and winter storms find rest. Water from the creek comes to it also, oozing from the gently sloping banks that are loose in texture by reason of the interminable tangle of thread-like roots of trees. At present there is no visible outlet or inlet, and we would soon have a dry hollow in the ground but for the unseen sources of supply that about equalize the evaporation. I once spent a half-holiday on the shores of Lake Ontario, and as I saw nothing but sand and water I soon wearied of it all, but to sit here, even at the year's least promising season, is better than a day in a museum.

Here is the record of my last day at the pool. Almost as soon as seated I saw a snake. The surface of the water was broken into a series of long, wavy lines, converging to a point that moved directly towards me. This augured well for a pleasant day, for snakes are not ill company. They add more than a widow's mite to the general cheerfulness, and I prize those that are now found on the meadows as much as my prejudiced ancestry feared the great serpents of their day. I do not know where the truth lies, but either the "enormous" snakes are all dead or my people of long ago magnified through fear those which they saw. I have known some very old people, men and women born almost as long ago as the middle of the last century, and have heard snake stories without end. Strangely enough the greater abundance of serpent-life one hundred years ago proved not an instance of familiarity breeding contempt, but of adding intensity to our "natural antipathy" as it has been called. If I am to believe my own grandfather, snakes as long as a fence-rail were not uncommon once. Well, I do not believe him. To add a few inches to every foot of a living snake was no peculiarity of his,

however. It is a common practice now. Nobody that rushes to a village newspaper with a snake story but tells the public what is not so; and an utterly tame, pointless incident is magnified to the importance of an exciting adventure.

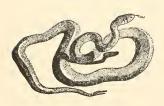
There are several species of snakes that are fairly common to these meadows, and while only two are so aquatic in habit as to be associated with water rather than land, not one of the others but is at home in the creeks or pools, when required to enter them. Every one of them has a wholesome fear of man. What pity it is we do not take time to see this. Not yet has the ophiophobic bacillus been discovered.

My pretty snake came very near to me, and with an air of deliberation that would have gone to the heart of a student of psychology. Its bright, beady, black eyes were as crystals of intelligence, a concentration of consciousness; wholly different from the simple sparkling of a faceted gem. I have at times a leaning towards the meaningfulness of such a phrase as the light of the soul. We are constantly encountering a subtle something that seems to prove that life is more than the play of chemic forces. The play, too, of the serpent's forked

tongue was a delight. It was gracefully feeling the air for some purpose not apparent to me, but not vainly beating it, as man is so given to doing.

The sun shone lovingly upon a mat of dead grass and leaves, and here, within arm's-length of where I was resting in not very comfortable quarters, the snake coiled itself for a sunbath and quiet nap. Its skin was very clean. Every scale was glossy, and as the creature turned and curved in its own graceful way, each one seemed to raise up and close down like the lid of a box. Probably this was only a trick of the light, but there was no mistaking the deep inbreathing, the resultant swelling of the body and its gentle collapse to normal caliber. I fancied I heard the low grunt of perfect content such as is common to a lazy man at the end of a like series of exertions.

I was sorry to disturb my friend, but was already tired of sitting perfectly still, and to watch the creature sleep might prove monotonous. I moved a little. Never were senses put in active service more promptly than by that snake. It uncoiled a good one-third of its length, gave me one searching and probably reproachful glance, and then silently



and curved . . . "

as the shadow of a summer cloud floats over a field but swiftly as the lightning's flash darted back to the pool, and I saw it no more.

The coming and going of this water-snake recalled many another that I have surprised when rambling near the water's edge, and as often when far away from pond or stream, for water-snakes are strange wanderers and leave their proper habitat for localities wholly different. My snake of to-day recalled, too, strictly upland species which once so common are now almost extinct; the calico-snake, red and yellow and beautifully marked, and the chain-snake, black and white and graceful as a whip-lash. The former was a "domestic" snake, in a limited sense, and was often caught napping on the sunny side of the barn, and had other quarters in a stone wall, into some cranny of which it often darted so swiftly as to leave me in doubt if I had really seen a snake.

I do not think, as a child, I ever ventured to put my hands on a calico-snake. Their size, some four feet in length, was a little forbidding, but it never occurred to me to run from them. To my childish fancy they seemed "funny" rather

than fearsome. While keeping at a prudent distance, as I supposed it to be, when watching a calico-snake near the house or a chain-snake in the woods I never failed to take up in my hands all the little snakes I found.

I am sorely puzzled to understand why a certain little, blunt-headed brown fellow has disappeared even more completely than the larger species I have mentioned. Cope says they are found "in rotten wood and old tree-trunks that have long laid on the ground and have the bark loose." I have torn to bits many such dead trees, but the little snake was never there; yet, it is but a quarter of a century ago that it was abundant. I had no trouble keeping them in confinement, and found they flourished admirably on insects of almost any kind. In fact, their insectivorous habits made them quite entertaining.

We have very pretty worms that eat cabbage leaves, and they are nothing but worms, but a snake with head uplifted ready to strike the unsuspecting mouse, is a very different picture. We have abundant evidence of intelligence in the latter instance, and none whatever in the former. As to snakes swallowing their young, and charming birds and

squirrels, I leave that to the naturalists. I have never seen any evidence of either act, and never expect to.

What everybody can see, however, is that serpents are very different in disposition. They are ill-natured or amiable, and this is always true of them. It is the one thing or the other. The slender, striped garter-snake, the green snake and the little fellow with a gold band about his neck all have what women call a "lovely disposition," and you can never provoke them to anger. But no trace of good humor was ever exhibited by a "puff-adder," as our harmless hog-nosed snake is called about here. This surly serpent acts as if it considered all the world as its enemy, resenting even the wafting of a dead leaf across its sunny path. This blustering, spitting, snarly snake is perfectly harmless, and apes all the ways, except the dignity, of a rattler.

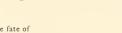
I have never found the outdoor world so good a place wherein to meditate as is the chimney corner, if it be winter, or my favorite easy-chair in the shady, back yard or on the porch, if it be summer. There is too constant a coming and going that it is unwise to disregard. However prominent in the mind the last object of interest, when it disap-

pears our recollection of it will not, or should not, obscure whatever comes to take its place. We are out of doors for facts more than for the solution of their significance, which can be determined later, and surely every nameless nook of untamed nature is full of them. Do not measure the importance of any fact by the stir it makes in your little world.

Little facts are often big with meaning, and that which can teach us most is often at our feet, as if begging our consideration. "The sparrow that is next the eye seems larger than the eagle that is perched on Bengoile"; yes, and often is of much larger importance. There is some objection to having a field-glass, as we are so prone to look at the bird "perched on Bengoile" a mile away, and quite forget the no less important one at hand, and worse, even, ignore the still lesser life that crowds about us. We are just too far away to see yonder bald eagle rob the fish-hawk, which is a not particularly edifying example of the world's unjust ways, and are blind to the fate of a grasshopper that, making a misjump, is gobbled up by a black-bass.

Then, it may be, there comes a faint sound of the song of some distant bird, and you wish you







were away, or the bird was nearer, that you could hear it more plainly; but why not listen to an humbler voice, even to the buzzing of a fly that whispers, so it seems to me, the whole story of the summer? Out in the meadows, far from the house and all that suggests a human habitation near, this buzzing fly gives forth a day-dreaming sound that stirs up every ghost that ever crossed my path. No one ever hurled more wrathful invectives at a fly than is my custom when striving to secure, indoors, my cherished afternoon nap, but here, amidfields, all is changed. Now this same fly bears a message from home, to which I cheerfully listen.

Nor is it wise to wonder what is just beyond our view, hidden by the rising ground or a clump of bushes. Do this, and the next nameless nook is always the overfull one and that before you is barren. I have known such folly to spoil many a day, and the habit, when confirmed, to spoil many a student who might have become a naturalist, but remained mere man.

Do not seek new fields until you have solved the problem of what part in nature is played by the scuttle-bugs and skaters that now are sporting on



voice, . . "

the water of this nameless nook. I say "sporting," for amusement seems to be their present aim, but it is really much more serious, as the minute creatures they devour might inform you if they but could. What wonderful shadows on the sand, where the water is shallow, are cast by the long-legged skaters! Their feet can be scarcely seen, unless your vision is of the keenest, but the magnified image is large and distinct in all its outlines.

As I watched these restless insects and their attendant shadows a crayfish came slowly from its burrow in the bank as if attracted by the dark spots that scored the sandy surface as the insect itself did the watery one above. But crayfish do not pursue their prey, they lie in wait: a distinct advance in intelligence. It was all a mere coincidence, but very deceptive, and the game of shadow-chasing seemed to be well played. As I moved—too frequent an error on the rambler's part—to get a nearer view, my own shadow fell upon the shallow water, and with startling rapidity the crayfish disappeared. It gave but one vigorous, backward leap, and I saw no more of it. I wondered if, in its short outing, it had kept the position of its retreat in the bank ever

in mind, and so be ready to land in it without failure on the appearance of danger. If this be true at all it must be to a very limited extent; but fleeing backwards from one danger, is it not likely to land directly in the jaws of another? The crayfish that we call "Diogenes" that lives in the meadow in a hole of its own digging and marks it by a round tower, the purpose of which is not apparent, seems to me a wiser creature than is his cousin who trusts to hiding in mud and weeds. Both have enemies, and life with them is much a matter of outwitting foes. We know too little yet to criticise the methods they pursue.

And how little we know of any nameless pool in its entirety. A bug here, a fish there, a creeping crustacean or a crawling worm and we go away satisfied. If we could but lift the water bodily from its bed as one would lift the lid of a box, what a mass of struggling creatures would be squirming before us. Who knows but that, at this moment, the biggest turtle ever seen about these meadows, the largest snake and the laziest mud-shad are now just out of sight, and so will go unrecorded? One needs only to be present when a mill-pond is drawn off to learn what treasures of wild-life are effectually

shut from view by a sheet of water. Write we never so closely their names, no foolscap sheet would hold the bare mention of every form of life in a quarter-acre pool, such as this before me now. Just beyond its limits, along the narrow strip upon which grass has not ventured there are footprints innumerable of furred and feathered creatures which through the long watches of the night have paced the tiny strand. Mice from the meadows, the lonely bittern, little herons, at least one muskrat, and shells, too, have wandered to and fro, leaving a continuous track. Here also is a confusion of marks, as if a fish had leaped ashore and had a hard struggle to again reach its proper element. is more than a little disheartening to be forever just too late,-to see the effects of a presence but not the presence itself. When the play is over the stage is a dreary place at best, and it is not often our privilege to witness the greater drama of wild-life's theater. He is fortunate indeed who is not more than teased by meager glimpses which work for mischief when they lead to the impression that the witness has seen all. How often has this proved the case!

ignorance, and unquestionably there are few braver acts in the lives of ordinary mortals than the open, unhesitating admission that we do not know. The time will never come when all things shall be known to any man. It is true we occasionally meet with wonderful erudition, and in our careless way of putting it, speak of such an one as a "walking encyclopedia," but learned as may be the man you meet he is not necessarily as safe a guide as he who looks you directly in the eyes and says, "I do not know." Such an admission begets confidence. We are sure that there is more in the speaker than he admits, and feel that here is one who is willing to go hand in hand with you in pursuit of a fact; nor is it a case, as might at first appear, of the blind leading the blind, but rather that of Candor and Humility starting out together in search of Truth. To never admit our ignorance is to publish it; but to announce it at the proper time and place is to effectually outwit our worst enemy, overestimation —the force that once in ascendancy drags us deeper and deeper into the mire of error.

When the occasion calls upon us to do so, say "I do not know." If it leads, as it should, to the

conviction that to have known would have been well with us, the incentive becomes ours to dig and delve henceforth until the facts are acquired. If ignorance is never a spur our case is hopeless. There is no nobler ambition than to find our place in nature, to know why and what we are. All this is as different from idle curiosity as the poles are far apart. Yet there are those in every community who ask us to accept their theories on the subject and ask no questions. The philosophers of twenty centuries ago solved a great many questions, but it is rash to maintain that they solved them all. No fixed formula can control the world. It moves, and the laws that are its safeguards must move with it.

It was my privilege for a full third of a century to be on most friendly footing with the greatest naturalist this country has produced, and one of the greatest in the world's history, Edward Drinker Cope. Very often, on the day following a long, lonely tramp in the meadows, I have gone to him to have him set aright the conflicting impressions that sorely vexed me about some turtle, fish, snake or frog, and I always found it better even than any information he could give me to hear him say with-

out a trace of hesitation, "I do not know." This meant always, I early learned, that in course of time, and often in the very near future, he would know, and then the knowledge gained would be cheerfully given over to me. I remember with startling vividness how patiently he scrutinized and compared and cut with a fine thread-like saw a water-worn fragment of a human cranium I had found, suggestively deep in glacial sands, and when I urged an expression of opinion as to its significance, would only shake his head and say, "I do not know." That fragment of a skull was and is to me a veritable trace of prehistoric man, and clear as is the problem now and then was to me, it could not gain further recognition from him than, "I do not know." His doubts were not discouraging, and were not intended to be He simply could not see as I saw, for he had not been present when the specimen was discovered. It might then have told a different story to him; the same, I doubt not, that it told to me. His "I do not know" did not suggest that the object itself contradicted its apparent history; in fact, it confirmed it. It might be a relic of paleolithic man, but he did not know, and said so.

There never was an assumption of superior knowledge on his part, though no one living had better right to assume, and just as he gave my discovery the benefit of his doubt, so had he done a hundred times before when my studies of the habits of animals failed to accord with his own impressions. He would never brutally declare that I was all wrong, but took the position honorable to him and fair to me, "I do not know," or, "I am very doubtful." Yet, he was a born fighter, if ever there was one. When, too, I had, as it proved, been groping in the dark, and went to talk over a supposed discovery, never was I laughed at or discouraged by sneers, but was set aright and sent away with a feeling of unbounded faith, because I had known him in other instances to say, "I do not know." He who freely admits his ignorance may well be relied upon when with the same promptness he says, "I do know."

The human mind is something very great in the highest stages of its development, but it has never yet reached the point of infallibility. Evolution must wrinkle the cerebrum many times more than it is wrinkled now before we reach such a point, and at the rate the astronomers tell us the world is wear-

ing out there is not much hope for such advanced mentality. Some who have taken the first step think they have gone the whole journey, and show not their strength, but their weakness, by valuing too highly the little that they know, and venture upon that little to theorize, not humbly, but in most dogmatic fashion. Alas, too often the accepted fact of yesterday becomes an historic fancy of to-day! Where we think we are treading on solid ground we may suddenly find ourselves tossed by an earthquake. The truth is, when knowledge is not guarded by humility it often proves a very clumsy counterfeit, and brings confusion to its possessors. It is only in the hands of the most humbly-wise that a theory is not a dangerous plaything.

I have had no experience with knowledge worthy of mention. It has very generally eluded my efforts to overtake it, but I can venture to say that many an apparent fact is anything but real. From early spring until summer is lost at last in the tumult of an autumn gale I have been the intimate of many birds, and as I recalled them during the long nights of the dreary winter that followed their coming and going, I felt that I knew them well; so well, indeed,

that I would recognize them again, one and all, when winter wore away and the violets were blooming; but not one of that merry host but proved more or less a stranger. New ways with them broke in effectually upon my conceit, and left me the sole alternative of admitting that I was still ignorant; and year after year must follow with a great deal still to be learned about them. And this is true, likewise, of every tree and shrub, beast, bug and butterfly; there is ever something to learn. All my days confident, but in this, because of the depths of my ignorance and not with the blessed humility that guards great knowledge, I shall constantly be forced to admit, I do not know.

Humiliating? Not at all. While nature is lavish of pleasant sights and sounds, though I comprehend them not, my happiness is assured. When we enter some one of our great public libraries and see miles of shelves laden and heavy-laden with volumes we wonder who read all these books, and if given the task to do so would die of despair before the day was done, but to compass the learning of a library is even nearer practicability than to fathom the secrets of a meadow-pool. At best, as

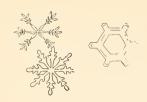
we come, day after day, we can only gather inklings; and these are not always transmissible. Nature by proxy is too near a farce for sober-minded folk. Camels through needles' eyes is easy enough in comparison with putting Nature on a printed page. She suffers a good deal at our hands, but to set her up in type is a little too much. Truly,

Sweet, nameless nooks, Like babbling brooks, Forever charming, Save, in books.

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher.

Mystery of mysteries, saith the naturalist, all is mystery!





# The First Few Flakes



A SILVERY threads steal across our temples while yet we think of ourselves as young, so, as the glory of the October woods is fading and the leaves are falling among the late autumnal bloom, we may feel perchance, when idly rambling, a chilling touch upon the hand or face, and, looking closely, see to our surprise the first few flakes of snow. No hint could be more gentle, yet unmistakable. Winter is at last preparing in good earnest for his south-bound journey.

It matters not how brightly the sun may shine hereafter, a change has been effected that we cannot ignore. To think of hail in midsummer and a flurry of snow in April affords no comfort if we take unkindly to the presence of the few flakes that, drifting from the passing cloud, speak so plainly of cold days to come when the air will be white with them. The round of the seasons is as sure as death. Why regret the passing of days that we knew

### THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

at their outset could not last long? Why, indeed! But who does not? It was only a moment ago that I was thinking how much of summer remained even at this late date, the last week in October, but now I cannot continue this train of thought. Those few flakes, that died almost at their birth, spoke too plainly to be misunderstood. Their message was no light matter to be forgotten as soon as heard. Winter is on its way and the whole world seems changed.

A month later and the majority of my neighbors would say we were to have twenty-three snows during the coming season; that is, as many as the date of the initial flurry. I have seldom met with one who did not aver this, and who if twitted about the absurdity of such a thing did not defend his position by the claim that it always turns out so. Argument goes for nothing, and I really am very glad. It is delightful to live where old furniture, old customs and old beliefs are cherished, and where at any turn we may expect to encounter some survival of "ye olden time." Science lengthens our days, but it is death to poetry, to superstition, to "spooks" and to fairy tales. The shadow that is but empty dark-

ness has no beauty like unto the gloaming inhabited by the elfs and fays our fancy conjures up.

That our ignorance may not lead us into some awkward error, it is necessary to look a little critically at times into the folk-lore of a neighborhood, and here, in the matter of snow in autumn, I find that originally the prediction was based on the date of the first snow of sufficient depth to allow of tracking a rabbit, which is quite another matter, for really we sometimes have these slight flurries of snow even in late September, and they mean no more than hail storms that are so common throughout summer. Somebody changed the original saying concerning the first snow, nobody knows just when or why, and perhaps it is not the first alteration, so we can do little more than conjecture the character of the original impression which, if brought from England, might not be applicable to the conditions here.

The altered folk-lore saying may possibly be explained in consequence of the diminished quantity of snow that now falls during the winter as compared with a century ago. It is not well to ask that threadbare question, Has our climate changed?





".. the first snow of sufficient depth
to allow of tracking a rabbit, .."

### THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

Our oldest inhabitants say "Yes," and statistics, meteorological tables and scientific argumentation say "No." It is a tempting subject, but may lead to ill-temper, as the various cliques of human society are very set in their opinions; but whatever may be the precise truth as to our climate as a whole, we do appear to have less snow.

It is amusing to find an army of contradictors confronting you whenever a positive statement is made, as when we remark that we have less snow now than a century ago. It is of no consequence if we are contradicted. If we are to be forever silenced by contrary opinions we shall make no advance. There is less snow I am convinced, and my only concern is to determine what effect this change in our climate has had upon animal life. Off-hand, it might be said that snow-bound animals are now less frequently cooped up. If formerly they were shut in for weeks together, now it is only for days. This is strictly true, but with the present large excess of days when the snow does not restrict the movements of animal life, is there not likely to have come about changes due to the diminished arctic conditions? A low temperature alone is not fatal

to life except in comparatively few cases, and the change of habit it necessitates, as shown by bird-migration, is caused by the destruction of the food-supply and inability to turn from an insectivorous to herbivorous diet. The swallows and warblers must go because of failure of insect food, but the robin and cat-bird can turn to greenbrier berries and shriveled grapes and retain all their springtide cheerfulness.

Have any of our birds in so short a time as a century changed any habit? To meet the requirements of the case it would seem so, for certain it is that we have staying among us all winter a great many birds that are commonly accounted migratory, and one warbler—the myrtle-bird—has learned to find insects in localities where most of its cousins would starve. It seems to be a matter of education, experience being the teacher. No sooner does our house-wren leave us in October than the winterwren appears, and even when there is snow finds bare spots about that yield a food-supply. It is noticeable, too, that birds leave us when we do have a deep snow and return as the snow melts. Such winters as have practically no snow are not so very different from the rest of the year; lacking the

### THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

change that is so apparent where the ground is covered for the greater part of three or four months.

I know from family tradition and documentary evidence that snow was a feature of winter confidently looked for one hundred and fifty years ago, while now, as every one knows, in the same region snow is not expected as more than a passing feature of a few days now and then through the winter. No longer do our farmers put up their wagons and bring down their sleds, anticipating no need for the former and daily need for the latter for weeks together. This was a common practice that is now necessarily abolished.

We who live in the country have changed our habits, so why should not our brute neighbors have changed theirs? A century and a half ago the forest area very largely exceeded that of cultivated fields; now it is the reverse. What the one condition has to do with the other let others decide. Nor are our fields as fertile now as then. Manurial

stimulation has not kept up with the drain made upon their strength by continual cropping.

Hundreds of acres during

237

".. the jumping-mouse.. leaping high above the grass."

winter are bare as the sandy sea-coast. These absorb the solar heat to such a degree as to become too warm for the snow that falls, and unless the storm is prolonged remain bare ground when the near-by pastures are white. There is no diminution of precipitation, but in winter it comes as cold rain rather than as snow.

The complete change caused by the ground being covered by snow is of uncertain and

short duration, and as a consequence animal life has greater freedom from November to March than in times gone by. Even the fixed habits of hibernation, best exhibited by the bat, ground-hog, chipmunk and jumping-mouse, are not observed with the same regularity as formerly, and if various observers are not mistaken not one of these animals but is occasionally seen abroad dur-

gestive of complete satisfaction."

> ing a mild winter day. I would except the jumpingmouse, which is sensitive even to frost, and when the air is chilly you will look in vain for this creature leaping high above the grass. The bat, on the other hand, will flit in the winter sunshine for an hour or two and then hang itself up to rest, its

### THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

countenance very suggestive of complete satisfaction. The date of going into winter quarters being irregular and often very late, and the end thereof happening sometimes at a date unexpectedly early, we are surprised that the animals hibernated at all. In short, if a careful outdoor naturalist had reported the conditions of the country and habits of animals in early colonial times, and we could now compare his statements with the results of our own observations, a decided difference would probably be noticeable in many directions, and these wholly due to the fact that then the country was practically snow-bound during the winter while now it is not.

After writing the above few paragraphs I had an opportunity to talk with an intelligent old man, born in 1813, who was perfectly familiar with this neighborhood. I carefully guided the conversation into certain channels. He told me precisely what I believed to be true, and when at last I put the direct question, "Have we as much snow as formerly?" he said "No" in a most decisive manner, and then went on to describe the changes very much as I have done. He dated the change in our winters from 1836, and mentioned many details.

His belief was that the "materials" of our climate were about the same, but "of late years they are differently mixed." That the seasons were then more sharply defined than now was also his conviction, particularly the change from winter to spring. "When spring came, it came," he said, "and didn't dance about like sunshine and shadow when the wind blows." Straightway I saw the play of light and shade under the trees, and I knew what he meant. I do not believe the middle-aged men of to-day will make as interesting octogenarians as are those who now have turned fourscore years.

It is quite appropriate to hear a blue jay when we see, in October, the first few flakes. It was so this morning. Not

"The chatter of a jay
That echo murmured after,"

for it was not a rapid utterance, nor loud enough to make the echoes, but a clear, wholesome, frosty cry that hinted of autumn leaves and hazelnuts, and even more of the pretty chinkapins that ripen before frost touches them. Perhaps no bird needs prompting beyond the impulse born in its own body, but events are suggestive to them at times

#### THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

and start a long line of activities. The blue jay may not have noticed these first few flakes, but it called to real or imaginary companions and startled a lazy flicker who gave tongue, and every nuthatch and chickadee piped and chattered. Autumn was really begun. I had been wandering with the few remaining traces of summer, and, behold! autumn was announced. Mine the opportunity to be miserable or merry, and I chose to be the latter.

It develops our manifold capabilities to promptly adapt ourselves to the quick and many changes of this climate. With more than another month of autumn before me I keep thinking of winter, and yet it is within the memory of youth that winter has loudly threatened and not made good its words. Realizing the decided change that will probably come with the near future, there is one great work before the rambler, and one, too, that most folks largely overlook, the preparation that animal life makes for freezing weather and the long days and nights when the loose soil is firm as rock and the brooks are ice-bound. Much of the wild-life of the summer that is gone will reappear upon the scenes when summer comes again. The old animals, the

16

same birds, reptiles and fishes. The land-tortoise that my grandfather played with when a boy may still be wandering in the hillside woods.

It must not be inferred that winter is to a great extent a lifeless season, but we have not the same life. Whether a creature hibernates or is active there is some preparation made for the change from heat to cold, but just what, in all cases, has not been put on record. This change is gradual, and I can think of no instance of its being the single occupation of an animal at about the same time of year. It is not a habit for which we are on the lookout, and yet no creature is "caught napping." Whatever the change and however suddenly it may come, wild-life appears to be prepared for it, and later, when we find animals in their winter quarters, it is evident they have done something more than taken refuge in the first shelter that offered. In May we find birds, fish and insects busy at nest-building, and if we have patience enough can see the hermit crayfish building his curious mud-towers. This work of animal life is as prominent as the growth and unfolding of leaf and flower-buds, but never so the building of a winter home, yet they are fully half

### THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

as common as the nests of spring. One potent cause of a good deal of our ignorance is due to the waning of our interest and our dullness of perception after the heat of summer. The eagerness of youth that is renewed even in old people does not survive the bustle of early summer, and we suppose that all the animals we watched so persistently in May are now, like ourselves, doing nothing in October. I have seen many a jumping-mouse after it had snugly tucked itself away in its wonderful winter home, but have never seen one in the act of building its hibernaculum or getting into it. The whitefooted mouse domes over a bird's-nest and curls up in it for the frosty season, but these reconstructed birds'-nests are always finished and occupied when I find them. How early to begin to look for these activities in anticipation of winter I do not know.

Suggestive of winter as are the first few flakes of snow, that which we have reason to expect may not put in an appearance for many weeks. Indian summer with many merits peculiarly its own may last almost a month; glorious, golden days, when every object seems heavy with dust of the precious metal;

243

"The land-tortoise that my grandfather played with . . "

when languor rests upon every living thing and all activity is under protest rather than voluntary; when the bird drawls rather than sings, and even crows seem to be only talking to themselves. Strange days these, yet none are more delightful. But we do not always have an Indian summer. I have questioned more than one "oldest inhabitant" on this point, and always with the same result, and that invaluable little book, "Pierce On the Weather," tells the same story. But every old man I have interviewed insists that it was more frequently a feature of November than nowadays; and all being agreed on this point I think it must be true.

The true Indian summer does not put every bird to sleep, for now I hear the nuthatches more distinctly than in summer, when the resident species "Quank-quanked," while other birds were singing, disturbing rather than adding to the flood-tide of melody that swept across the meadows and over the upland fields. Now this same bird's quaint attempt at song is very welcome, and harmonizes with the surroundings. It is as if the season was speaking through the bird, and every season has its peculiar mouthpiece.

#### THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

In 1897 Indian summer was only twelve hours long. In other years I have known a repetition of that same dreamy day to last for fully four weeks. It is something to be looked for after the frosts of October, when we think that every hazy day is the beginning of a series of such days, but too often the wind veers to the northward and the charm flees; though even then the outlook is not desolate. In the clearer light, when all the world stands out more distinctly, there is much left to admire. The wrinkled bark of one old chestnut-oak stands out like the eternal rock along the river-shore. Never were the silvery birches whiter and seen so distinctly from afar. The crimson winterberry warms the thicket that, though leafless, is still dense enough to hide the meadow-brook. We can find color if we look with care, and interest abounds if we choose to find it. The clear, cold days are filled with facts that demand serious attention: the dreamy, Indian summer disposes us to look idly upon the world as if we were weary of our knowledge of what the world really is.

It is when the air is frosty in the morning, if not all day, that the robin is a wild bird, wilder now

than it was tame and confiding in early summer; a strange change known to every one but never explained. Their ear-piercing chirp is an alarm cry now, and the tree-tops, not the underbrush, their single haunt. The bird I have just heard will permit of no nearer approach and will be shy for just three months. In February, if the weather is mild and the ground not frozen, they will come wandering back and gather earthworms from the dooryard just as they did last summer. The shrill note of the wild robin in midautumn is suggestive, but not pleasantly so, and compares unfavorably with the hearty cawing of the ever-present crow.

It requires some courage to defend that which all the world condemns, for a universal impression is synonymous with a demonstrated truth, it is claimed; but, of course, this is not true. There is no reason, however, why a counter-impression should not go on record, even if only to prevent a false claim of priority in the event of a future discovery. So, let me say that while the crow is fully as black as he is painted, this blackness is only feather-deep.

Farmers see crows when the latter are in mischief,

## THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

but never when they are out of it. They know the penny that the bird cost yesterday, but not the dollar that it will save them to-morrow, for the amount of ravaging insect-life they destroy is enormous. A flock of crows, in autumn, does not wander from one end of a field to another for mere exercise. These birds do not turn over flat pebbles, scatter the matted weeds and harry the runways of fieldmice for amusement only. Shoot a crow at such a time, examine the contents of the stomach and be convinced; or, what is far better, accept the statements of those who have conscientiously studied the subject. The ill that crows do is so completely offset by the good they perform that statistics are not needed. The part they play as scavengers is overlooked, but the part is played with no less enthusiasm because a minor one in nature's drama.

Here is a sweeping statement that defies contradiction: Just in proportion as birds are protected, including crows, owls and hawks, the pursuit of agriculture becomes less onerous and the use of poisons by the hundredweight as insecticides will be unrequired, and the cost of expensive spraying machines will be saved. For a full half-century nature's quota

of native birds has not been allowed to roam the country over, and the difficulties of contending against the particular foes of each crop have increased.

Facts may be stubborn things, but they do not always withstand the assaults of deep-rooted prejudice. A few watermelons or a hill of corn destroyed, even if the crow is not the culprit, condemns the bird, and facts are no more regarded than idle words. Is not the crow black, and does not that mean everything? By acts if not by words man admits himself a creature of brutish unreason. He clings to the folk-lore of antiquity as if it were susceptible of mathematical demonstration. Elaborate argumentation is lost. The crow's defender may even be patiently listened to, and for answer hear "that hill o' corn and them melons." But what of the precautions taken to prevent such disaster? Crows are not willing to run any risks, and a bit of red flannel or glittering strip of tin will go a long way toward protecting planted ground. He who will not go to the trouble of outwitting a crow deserves to be outwitted by it. Prove beyond all doubt the desirability of rendering extinct any form of life before

## THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

the act is done. We have no resurrective powers.

The nearly-effected extinction of white herons that women's hats might be adorned, and the destruction of terns on our sea-coast for the same reason, is evidence enough that the average man needs a controlling power over him that he will be forced to respect. Years ago we needed a "sea-bird's protection act" applying to the whole country, but who would dare propose it? Even yet, those who attempt to set up the rights of birds against the whims of man are more than likely to be set down as fools. Herons, particularly in the tropics, are scavengers and are extremely valuable as such, while gulls and terns on our own sea-coast serve in much the same capacity; but, unfortunately, fashion still has the upper hand with women, and it seems men must have living targets for their guns. For years to come, it may be, the fool will thrive and the bird will suffer.

The crow is very black and ungraceful; he is no musician, in the ordinary acceptation of that term, and not desirable as food, but for all this we cannot afford to remove him from the landscape. The sky is all too dreary for continued inspection

when nothing prominent passes over it, and whether one crow or a hundred, it is a distinct gain to the outlook.

It is depressing to wander about an empty house; it chills the enthusiasm of the rambler to hear no sound; but worse than all to be forever looking in vain for solid, substantial, assertive forms of wild-life; and the crow is one of these forms. The poetry is lacking that surrounds the raven, but the bird has charms all its own, although known to so few of us. Man has been judging the crow from time immemorial, and has yet to begin to cultivate its acquaintance. When this is done all things corvine will not be considered as unworthy notice.

Perhaps it will be said that I care more for birds than business, for crows than crops. I sincerely hope so, but this does not vitiate my judgment. I am fond of the crow because he is cunning and has often outwitted me. I am the bird's admirer because with so much against him he has defied mankind and in its very midst often lives a long life in safety. Certainly there is no other bird that offers so fine an opportunity for the study of comparative psychology. He is a living contradiction

## THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

of the assertion that intelligence is greater among mammals than among birds, for no four-footed beast, not even the dog at its best, is the crow's intellectual equal. This will be disputed, of course, but the final disposing of the question does not alarm me.

It is my good fortune, as I walk along the home hillside, that the air is usually filled with the songs of many birds. Not a tree but trembles with the tread of the endless procession of the feathered host, and never is the sky forsaken by these winged wanderers of the earth that carry joy and not sorrow wheresoever they go. The thrush, the cardinal, the rose-breast, orioles and many a small warbler alike rejoice in the glories of the morning's sunrise hours, but above the melody that holds me to the haunts of all these birds, I hear the "Caw" of a crow from afar, and looking long I see the bird at last just skimming the tree-tops of the distant wood. I forget that it is summer; the leafy wilderness where now I stand has a more extended outlook. The green of the new leaf is the red of the frost-ripened foliage of October, and the air is filled with the cawing of many crows. Crows from the hills and valleys of a wide range of

country are now, as the day shortens, winging their way to the roost in some secluded swamp.

There is no single sight in nature that fits so completely with the surroundings as the afternoon procession of the crows. In the morning they scatter as so many individuals bent upon personal errands only; some hurriedly, many in a leisurely way; some garrulous, others moody. Comradeship is not desired. Before the morning is well advanced the spot is deserted, and the cry of the greatcrested flycatcher seems but a faint echo of the clamor that so lately resounded along the tortuous byways of this little wilderness; but as the day draws near its close, low down along the horizon we can, if watchful, mark the approach of the returning birds, and then for hours there passes overhead an endless company, progressing with method as an army rather than as individuals, and obedient to the orders of their appointed leaders.

It was many a year ago that I first saw the afternoon flights of crows in autumn, and to this day I am not weary with its repetition. The cawing of a crow, as the gloaming deepens into darkness, is as meaningful and hearty a "Good-night" as ever

# THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

reaches the ears of the patient rambler. The crow, in that one syllable, "Caw," epitomizes the glory of our many-sided year.

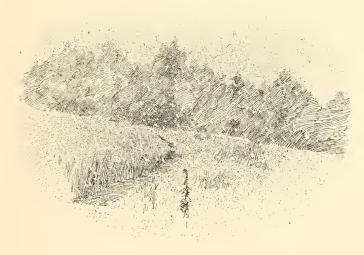
Those first few flakes that I saw so recently have all melted in the clear sunshine that now prevails, and I am ready to move on, but do not, for there has come within sight and hearing that charming feature of these pleasant days, a belated bird. Migration has long been a phenomenon of the past. The summer songsters have gone southward; the northern birds are all here, save the few uncertain stragglers that may or may not come, as winter proves severe or mild. We have snowbirds now, and tree-sparrows, and the shrike. Chickadees and red-bellied nuthatches take the place of summer warblers and the redstart. The wren-boxes are deserted, but there is a winter wren in the woodpile; but now, flitting about the bushes very unconcernedly is a yellow-breasted chat, a bird more sensitive than any other to frost. Belated, for some reason, but not down-hearted, and I hoped, but in vain, that it would sing once more before it passed out of hearing. Perhaps it could not fly for a time, though it was making excellent progress and taking

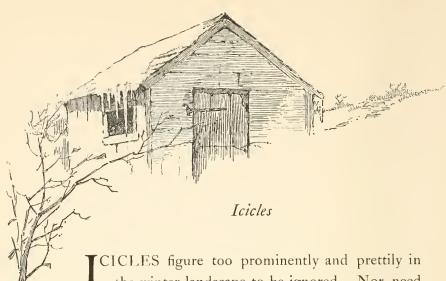
the right direction. From bush to bush it could flutter from here to the thickets by the ocean at some sheltered point, like Holly Beach, and if it could go no farther would there be safe. Many a bird winters in the warm nooks of southern New Jersey that is down in the books as going to South America. It is true of the species as a whole, but not of every individual. I was strongly tempted to plead with it to tarry yet awhile longer; to argue with it that the hillside was yet a fitting abode for even tender birds; that beauty still lingered along each winding path and pleasure might yet be found beneath the solemn arches of these aged oaks. I was almost moved to cry "Stay!" but knew all too well that if it heard me it would heed me not. That strange impulse that draws the summer bird southward, as the magnet attracts bits of iron, moved this belated chat beyond any power of mine to check its course, and there was left for me only the present recollection that for a passing moment we had met.

I have met with many belated birds, and they are never forlorn. The novelty of the situation seems rather to be enjoyed, as is proved by the occasional

## THE FIRST FEW FLAKES

bursts of song that are so startling when we think the woods are empty. The rambler, on the other hand, when afield may often be too late for some things he would witness, but never belated in the sense of tardy migrating birds. He never finds, or should find, himself out of place. Adapted to all conditions, to every extreme of climate, the world is, or should be, homelike wherever chance may find him. In the truest sense he is at home in Nature's realm who, unlike summer's birds, is not disheartened when he sees the first few flakes of snow.





the winter landscape to be ignored. Nor need they be of huge dimensions to make them worthy of contemplation. A hundred tapering spears of ice glittering in the sun as they droop from the cottage-roof are no less gems of the first water than the immense bars of opaque and wrinkled ice that hang in mid-air from Niagara's cliffs. In the latter we have winter's strength; in the former, her beauty. The two are the uncut and cut diamonds of a December day. Or, if we wish to be awed by Nature, go to Niagara; but my preference is to be more simply entertained, and I am content with the dripping eaves of the woodshed.

Leave to geologists the Ice Age, long the arena

of their wordy contests, and to physicists the huge icicular growths where torrents plunge. The study of such crystallized water means work, and the contemplative rambler, wooed by December sunshine, is given only to play. Yet it would be an error to suppose that the consideration of small things is but idling away our time. A truce to Newton's apple and all silly tales as evidence. That the little epitomizes the great is a truism. The preference for a microcosm or a macrocosm is merely a matter of personal choice. Whether one or the other, the general trend of thought will be the same, and I venture to suggest the desirability of small things over large for the majority of people, for there are few of us really who are not micro rather than macrocosmic.

There is no more common mistake than attempting too much. Pride too often prevents our measuring our strength, and surely he who correctly appreciates his limitations is best fitted to attain to ultimate success. To plunge into a snowbank will not lead to the discovery of snow's real significance. That may be a problem too great for our comprehension. There are thousands of people who can grasp the fact of the freezing of the river, but the

17

great glaciers that creep down the mountain's side or set adrift gigantic icebergs at the margin of the sea are phenomena too stupendous to be grasped by many a mind. They can realize such things as facts only, but their full meaning, their age, their origin, the power they wield, and the influence they exert are quite beyond them. We have in each instance the phenomenon of frozen water, but under different conditions, and when unwise ambition leads us to ignore the simpler manifestations of nature in congealed water we are just so much the less fitted to comprehend her grander efforts in the same direction. Never let it be forgotten that the human mind falls short just as does physical strength. There is a limit to each. The starry sky is alike a starry sky to all, but only a very few people, try they ever so hard, can become astronomers.

This thought should not discourage us. There is abundant recompense for those who are entertained by the minor events of the outdoor world and leave the major ones to those who have strength equal to their tasks. We cannot all be great travelers, but he who stays at home need not remain ignorant. Nature's workshops are not all perched on mountain

peaks. The level plain is as busy a scene of activity, though the output be not on so grand a scale. He, therefore, is wise who learns to love the little, and is far from remaining forever as a child, "pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw," because he finds his satisfaction in nature's humbler phases.

This view of average humanity is in no sense disrespectful, if calmly considered, and the icicles prove it. Those that hang from the woodshed's eaves and glitter in the sun only to waste away,—drip, drip, dripping in a pleasant monotone,—are quite within the compass of our strength. The sun-bathed rustic-seat the woodshed offers keeps us at ease, and we are spared the tax upon human energy exacted from the explorer who ventures afar.

The modest icicle at home is brilliantly graceful, which cannot be truthfully asserted of all objects where nature rules supreme. Yet never impute positive ugliness to natural objects. It is a common practice, which rightfully interpreted means that we are ill-favored; our thoughts wandering in crooked paths of our own plotting. We are all too apt to be ugly and disposed to make the world as ourselves, but nature knows nothing of offensive act;

the fault lies in ourselves. We aspire to the building of a marble palace with nothing better than a sun-dried brick in hand, and hold nature responsible for the resultant disappointment.

I hold the icicle as the embodiment of grace. It is not even cold, and so repellant, now the sun is shining. Not a color of the rainbow but is prominent; now red, or blue, or green, as I change my point of view. How sharp the end of the icicle may be you can prove by pressing it with your finger. As I did this, the thought came that herein might we have primeval man's first spear, as readily in the thorns of shrubs or horns of animals. In a fit of anger homo paleolithicus in the Delaware Valley pricked himself with an icicle and the efficacy of a pointed weapon dawned upon him. From sharpened ice to a sharpened stone is a short step, and, when taken, then and there the savage of the Ice Age took his first upward and onward step in human progress.

Imagination here, as at many another point, runs a great danger of overleaping itself, so it is safer to consider what real part in the day's drama the icicle does play. I leave it for others to determine for

### ICICLES

themselves. Nature at first hands is a rule without exception. Nothing suffers more from overhandling than her simple facts. What part does an icicle play? Ask that question of any familiar object in nature and our ignorance is apparent. Very generally we have learned how objects come into being; how rocks are formed, plants grow and animals are born, but Why? The question plagues us whenever we fail to shut it out. It rings in our ears as winter wears away; when spring unfolds her beauties; when summer and autumn make good their promises. We live a life of expectation, and within limits nature never disappoints; but, still, Why? The philosopher is yet to be born who shall make all things known to us.

Winter sunshine in December is a sadly brief period, and one that steadily grows less, wholly unlike its period of growth in February, when we have a different atmosphere and variation of temperature goes for nothing. The mercury at zero does not affect the springtide light of a day at the end of winter. It is an instance where language fails. There are minor matters in nature that defy accurate description. Above the roar of many a

midwinter storm the rambler will detect a whisper lost to others' ears that spring is really, even now, upon her way, and we fancy that the icicles that grew in the night more rapidly waste away at noontide. But we think not of this in early December. Then it is "Act I., scene one," and we are all expectation, knowing January is soon to appear, when frost will set the seal of silence even upon the running brooks.

The objection will doubtless be raised that the suggestiveness of icicles is open to criticism, because they always point to the earth. Indeed, had I not heard this I should not have thought to defend them. "As your head is above your feet, so let your thought be above the ground you stand upon." Mouth well a few high-sounding words, and you catch the unwary as honey traps the giddy fly. As a simple matter of fact, no belittling of this earth ever fitted one for a better sphere, and the despised ground on which men tread has yielded many a secret by which a greater measure of comfort has been secured; comfort more valuable than any vague aspirations. It is well to think little of those who think little of the earth. No weightier words ever

fell from Thoreau's lips than "one world at a time."

I had no thought of it before, and am the more thankful now that the icicle points to the earth and bids me consider it. It suggests a ramble, though it is December, and I find as surely as the icicle points downward the earth looks upward, looks boldly skyward with unflinching gaze, feeling itself a fit companion for all else of the great universe of which it is a part.

Crimson fruit and richly-ruddy leaves still cling to many a vine and bush and tree, having withstood the fury of the memorable storm of a month ago, when a November gale proved to be a veritable arctic blast. Bare branches are desolate-looking, much as we may philosophize, but the plucky undergrowth is cheerful in such measure as it holds to a remnant of the departed summer. It is well to temper the north wind with recollections of a sunny, summer breeze that dallied, months ago, in the green wilderness. I can always find winter in the hottest summer, so why not some trace of summer in the midst of winter? In the cellar of a house near-by, into which daylight has not crept for one hundred and ninety years, you will be sure to

shiver even of a tropical August afternoon. I can and do feel warm, however low the mercury may range, when, at Christmas, I face color out of doors. Not funereal browns or the dingy green of frost-defying ferns, but bright, æstival colors, like that of the fruit of climbing bittersweet and the ripe redness of the leaves that linger on the scarlet oak. Winter sunshine on the frozen fields, like some people we meet, has little soul or none, and loves to mock us; but overflows with sweet reasonableness and fulfills a blessed purpose where the ruddy leaves of the dewberry vines brighten the dull clods of frozen earth. We must see winter sunshine through the leaves of the scarlet oak to see it at its best. Then, though cold as charity, we have summer epitomized; a September sunset contrasted to a gem of rarest beauty, and all the ice and snow in the landscape disappear. There is a magic warmth born of color; so subtle no thermometer can gauge it, but it draws all frost from me when I chance upon it.

The fruit of the November gales is still to be gathered, and nowhere that I wander is it neglected by the birds. The host that might have lingered

#### ICICLES

I say this because there is not a species of winter birds that is not more than usually represented. Where we ordinarily see one or two of a kind in a day's walk I see a full dozen. At times I thought that every tree had its little brown creeper. There is no break in the querulous plaint of the two nuthatches. Chickadees are in every clump of bushes. What a merry cry is that of the congregated crows far off on the river-shore!

Still gazing directly toward the earth, looking only where the icicles point, I wonder if birds fancy, as I do, that they feel the warmth of color. On the knolls that dot the meadows there is many a patch of rank grass, now a rich yellow, very graceful, very beautiful, and I persist in adding, very warm. Would it seem the same, or really be the same, if another color? If dingy brown, and suggestive of winter, surely not; if blackened by the frost or blanched by winter's storms we would involuntarily shun, not seek it; but the bright yellow suggests sunlight and the golden bloom of early autumn. We draw near naturally; we are attracted to it just as surely as we turn from the bare, frozen

earth. There is no affectation in declaring that it is like approaching a fire to walk up to this tall, wavy, yellow grass.

It has some significance, I hold, that every patch of this "Indian grass" I came to harbored birds. Meadow-larks flew from one, horned larks from another and a song-sparrow shared a third with me, chirping its displeasure at being disturbed but having sufficient faith in me to remain hard by. I sat down for the moment, and could see only the grass itself and the sky above me, and it was surely a warmer spot than the open meadows about me. Icicles, pointing earthward, have directed me to a spot I might otherwise have missed.

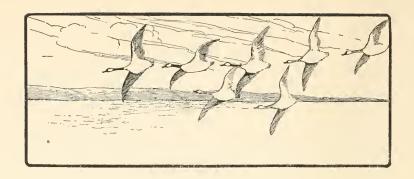
Winter sunshine, when we cross the bleak, upland fields, strongly accentuates the winter's cold. It is glittering as the eye of an angry serpent and as pitiless; it is the polish of the steel, and a bright sword, we know, cuts deeper than a rusty blade; but nothing of all this in the meadow with its welcoming yellow grass. Winter is only dreary when we look in the wrong direction.

Homeward, but by another route, I note the fresh, green moss, the frost-defying cedar, the fring-

#### ICICLES

ing grass where ripples a little brook, and about them all the restless songsters warbling their delight, praising the earth as they find it, and well they may. As I follow the narrow path my steps are stayed at a miniature ravine, where ferns still cling to the damp earth and wintergreen, with abiding faith, greets with a summery smile all who pass it. Though silent, it is eloquent of the luxuriant growths that trustfully await the coming of a milder day, and above all depend icicles, tiny crystal spears pointing to the earth. We have heard, until weary of the words, of tongues in trees and sermons in stones: there is likewise a volume of sound common-sense in every icicle.





# What's in the Wind?

A QUESTION, this, that is often asked, but no real knowledge is desired. Idle gossip moves us more than portentous truth. As we hear it, these words are but an awkward phrase, evincing curiosity of the meaner kind, but which can be put to respectable use. Of late I have been asking myself, as I sniffed the morning air, What's in the wind? No reference to my neighbors, be it understood. What I think of them or they think of me counts for little. I am concerned with the message of the light, whispering breeze that comes leisurely over the meadows, moisture-laden, from the south; comes so gently, a tiptoeing breeze, that the ghostlike skeletons of last summer's weeds

## WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

are not disturbed, and crisp, yellow leaves that still cling to the branches of low oaks barely hint to the rambler that the air is in motion. Can there be anything in such a wind? Let us see.

There comes upon it the faint, bell-like notes of a field-sparrow, rejoicing that spring is on the way, for this little bird is an avant courier of warmer days and has unbounded faith, or is it that birds know more than man, have some additional sense that recognizes conditions men know nothing of? We all talk glibly of signs of spring that are in no sense such, but what of a bird's interpretative powers? A bird's-eye view may be very different to them from what we call such, a mere comprehensive glance. It is useless to speculate as to this or the simple fact of the going and coming of the birds. They do go and come, and let us be thankful. Go and come the more cheerfully and freely because here is no enemy to fret them, other than those nature has seen fit to call into existence.

On the same breeze comes the glad song, or, more correctly, the intensely happy chorus of innumerable blackbirds, every one looking with eager glances at last year's nesting-sites, and antici-

pating the coming of spring and home joys the while. Singing, too, every bird of them, in a way that has moved even our great poets to speak appreciatively of the song.

Again, as if to reward the patient rambler, there comes upon this same gentle, southern breeze the wild, weird cry of north-bound geese, flying in one long, unchanging line that as it passes high overhead, slightly bends and wavers as if vexed with doubt, and then, with confidence renewed, passes on with marvelous precision of wing motion and unvarying relative positions. What their purpose is in continually "Honking," as the gunners call it, cannot be determined. They are always too near together to require any signal cry, and conversation, if it were such, would not be so loud or monotonous. Whatever it may mean to the geese, their "Honking" is music to me, something more important than vain speculations in animal psychology. It is, above all else in nature as we now find it here, a thrilling sound; one that rouses the long-dormant instincts of primitive man-man of the hunter stage. I forget all else for the time being when geese go over, and I watch with eager eyes and ears

## WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

until the last faint sound has died away and the birds themselves are lost in the distant horizon. To see migrating geese is to live a moment of intensest pleasure; only a moment, yet it is one that lives longer in the memory than the jubilant song of the cardinal, now heard on the hillside, or the dulcet tones of the bluebirds that, drifting idly in the upper air, call to the sleeping buds to awake and rejoice in the blessed sunshine.

Ever-laden and heavy-laden with the songs of birds, would that the south wind might blow forever!

If I mistake not, I have seen somewhere a ponderous government tome, entitled "Winds of the Globe," but, although it suggests comprehensiveness, its forbidding pages found no room to report the whispering summer breeze which comes, for ought I know, from dreamy cloud-land overhead, and barely rouses to mildest activity the sleepy earth; that tempers the torrid sunshine, and brings with it the odor of the blossoming grape, the rich, fragrant breath of the maturing season. It is a reviving breeze that brings the rambler to his senses and spurs ambition just so far that the meaning of

the day must not be lost. There are animals that restivate as well as those, the more abundant, that hibernate, but men are all too apt to do both in season, when the conditions are not exactly to their fancy. I was indulging in an restivative nap just now, but the breeze broke in upon it, scattered the good fellows of my dreams, and brought me back to the real world, the world with its flowers atop the meadow-grass, and every one nodding, not with heaviness, but gaily and wide-awake to every whispered message.

This same breeze admonishes me to be stirring again, and to go aprying into the byways of the woods or weedy corners of the meadows. This is the rambler's proper business. Surely we do not know the house of our friend if we have only passed through its hallway. We must see, too, the banqueting-room and library; even the cellar and attic. There are those who think that to ring the door-bell and leave a card is sufficient. They feel acquainted by so doing, but I think they are still strangers, one to the other. Certainly such methods will avail nothing in the outdoor world. Formalities lead to nothing here, whatever they may sig-

## WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

nify in the town. Nature's friendship must be gained, an honest intimacy brought about, or we are strangers. There is no half-way. Nature recognizes no mere acquaintance. Whether it be the gentlest breathing of a summer breeze, or the blast that foreruns the thunder-storm, there is that one indisputable fact in the wind.

In a climate so changeable as ours it requires a long apprenticeship and very patient application as well as the exercise of every power of observation and the highest development of every sense to read with something approaching accuracy the message of the wind. It is never without significance, but just what that significance is, it is not every one who can say. Man is too opinionative for his own good, and so what's in the wind everybody will tell you for the asking, but unfortunately the truth is lost among the errors, as the lone grain of wheat is hidden in the bushel of chaff.

Gray's peasant-folk, who "heard a voice in every wind, and snatched a fearful joy," were never, I think, dwellers in these parts, for no folk-lore has been handed down that suggests superstition. No midnight flight of the ghosts of murdered and

18

murderer blanched the cheek when shrill winds bent the tree-tops. No wandering spirit begged to reënter the cottage when the passing breeze rattled the loose-hung door. However mournful the sound that filled the chimney-place, it was to those who heard it but the voice of the wind. Neither was I, as a child, nor any of my playmates, told any quaint conceit of the murmuring summer breeze being the strange guise of that gentle fairy who scattered butterflies over the fields that blossoms might have fit company. All was plain matter-of-fact when I was young, and so the sunshine of infancy was slightly dimmed. It is less a shock to learn, at last, that no fairies exist, than to find in graver matters deception has been practiced. No fairy of the wind then; but now, when the tall grain bends to the breeze, I can fancy some good fay tripping lightly over it, and when the leaves tremble and flowers nod, what messages of good cheer are whispered! Out upon the notion that the summer breeze is naught but air in motion! That will do for the class-room. Something less prosaic, please, when under the bright, blue sky.

Perhaps this is well, perhaps not; but debate is

## WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

scarcely called for. My own feeling is, better fancy's wild ideal than a too prosaic story. It is scarcely desirable for a community to grow up mathematically exact. Such people too readily tire of each other. I have known a small gathering of the unimaginative to yawn more than they talked at the end of an hour. They told too tersely all they knew, and little was said that was not familiar matter to the others. A really startling remark would have shaken the furniture as might an earthquake.

But the voice of the wind was far from meaningless to these prosaic forefathers of mine, or to their neighbors. Its full significance was well understood. Without knowledge of cold waves born in Manitoba or of hurricanes bred in the Gulf, to them the weather was no enigma. Gathered at night about the capacious, open fireplace in the kitchen the steady hum of the wind heard above the crackling fire passed apparently unnoticed; but let any change occur, however slight, and every man was quick to detect it and mention what it meant. This is not so strange as it may seem. The voice of the west wind is not that of the east; nor the voice of the

south wind that of the north. I speak now of localities where there are trees, and the country is not a vast, level plain. Speaking of my own home, when the great, uplifted branches of the gigantic beeches lash the air and the wind whistles shrilly as it dashes through them a weather change is meant far different from the soft soughing of the gentle breeze dallying with the feathery tips of the lofty pines. When the long-continued monotone is suddenly interrupted, the silence, likewise, commands attention. Likewise, but to a greater degree, were the people of old given to marking every change. We hear the voice of the wind, yet seldom heed it; time was when it was not only understood, but its message noted. People a century ago were necessarily weather-wise, and few were their errors, considering the limitations of their knowledge. They had shorter notice then than now of what was to be, but they were not given to misinterpreting the warnings.

Our weather bureau is a distinct advance over the facilities for weather predictions available to our forefathers; but plain, practical folk that they were, they would have appreciated the absurdity of many

### WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

a present-day bulletin that gravely announces, "Clearing weather, preceded by rain"; as if this had not been the unvarying course of events during the millions of years that rain has been falling upon the earth.

The Quakers brought no fairy tales with them to this part of Jersey, nor troubled themselves to make note of what whims were current among the Indians they displaced. More's the pity, but as the years rolled by these staid farmers learned to interpret the voices of the wind; a small favor I now thankfully receive. I have said they learned nothing of the Indians; this may not be quite true. Even to-day we hear the phrase, "According to the old Indian rule," so and so. How far in such cases this is truly referable to the country's native race I have not been able to determine, but some of the "weather proverbs" supposedly of American origin I have identified as English or German.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth and we hear the sound thereof," and were it not for a strange indifference as to nature's activities we could tell the inquiring child a great deal about it; not only as to its origin and destination, but the purpose thereof.

To interpret the wind as to its primal cause may be beyond human power, for what has been written is not free from theory; but granting this, the whole subject need not be set aside as idle, for it is not what is or what causes but what is in the wind with which we have to do, for it never comes emptyhanded, whensoever or whencesoever it reaches us.

The wind is full of meaning if it but cools our heated brows and moves us to be thankful. The prose of a torrid day that plagued us by its unsuggestive heaviness is turned at once to poetry that scorns to be clothed in words, for who hath writ a worthy ode to a breath of fresh air? And even if the wind is in an angry mood, the forerunner of a storm, it comes with a sound of warning so unmistakable that it is our fault if we do not heed it. No tempest ever tore a branch from a tree merely that we might be struck by it. It simply has its work to do and does it without fear or favor. If we are "caught napping" we have only our negligence to blame. The danger signal is afloat and high above every obstacle. If blind it is our own misfortune.

There is no other than our own door at which we

# WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

can lay the blame. The track of the wind may not be as plain as that of a railroad, but it is never wholly hidden from us. Were our eyes and ears, and, indeed, our interests, what nature intended, we could see and hear with greater distinctness. What, to most of us, is so sorry a jumble of words as the "music of the spheres"? yet it might be not only intelligible, but a source of exquisite pleasure. Indifference, artificiality and low levels of activity have thwarted nature's intentions, dimmed our vision and muffled our hearing almost to deafness. Unnoticed, many a cloud goes rushing by, and the shrill whistle of the forerunning and foretelling blast is all unheeded, but not by the open-eyed and open-eared rambler. Whether in the depths of the forest or upon the open meadow, he, for one, knows what is in the wind, and how often that moment is a golden opportunity. What most men cannot do is the common power of every bird that flies or beast that runs, and how full of meaning the wind is to creatures other than human is made manifest by their actions at such a time. There is more visible and audible natural history in the ten minutes before the storm breaks

than in hours of calm serenity of earth and air. The languor that overtakes the rambler of a summer's day quiets the creatures he is ever in hopes of seeing. Not all, of course, for there are flycatchers which would be, I think, even merrier than they are were the days hot almost to conflagration, and fiery-bronzed beetles that seem children of sunbeams rather than commonplace insects. They play their part with the specialist, and do to fill cabinets at which people gaze with passing wonder; but the thrush and redstart, the cat-bird and robin, warblers and swallows, sparrows and orioles—these are all aroused as the breeze ruffles their feathers and bends the twigs upon which they have been lazily resting. They feel their energies renewed and sing ecstatically of their joy at the change, but not without a thought of the near future, for very methodically do they seek shelter, disappearing just in the nick of time. I would that some one would tell me where they all go.

The storm breaks, and save the roaring of the wind and the dash and splutter of raindrops we hear nothing for the time; then, never too soon, nor yet so late that all the world knows it, the robin

## WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

announces that the shower has gone by, and every bird of the woodland and the fields repeats the glad tidings.

Just before and just after a summer shower are supreme moments, and not only with the birds. It is worth a long walk to see the scattered chipmunks hie to their homes in the ground, and to hear the wandering squirrels chatter and see them scamper to their hollow trees when a black cloud obscures the sun. Not so much as a drop of rain is to their liking when caught away from home. Their shelter reached, they can consider the matter at their convenience and take a shower-bath if so inclined. It is the run home when it begins to rain that is ever so human and so funny.

I have seen a sedate turtle look up, with outstretched neck and turning to every point of the compass, when the sunshine was suddenly cut off, as if it was asking itself, What is the matter? It was so strongly suggestive of this that, perhaps, I do not give the noise and openness of my approach the importance due to it. It is well not to be too strict in non-essentials. Had I weighed the matter over carefully I should have missed all the merri-

ment the anxious turtle gave me. One, to go rightly afield, should seek the light entertainment of fancy as well as the solid acquisition of a fact.

Through the sunlit hours of the forenoon there may not have been a ripple upon the meadow-pool, but no sooner does the lightest breeze pass over it than the glassy surface trembles and bullfrogs innumerable look up and out upon the wide world about them. First one and then another croaks his satisfaction or disgust—either interpretation is plausible—and if the skies are overcast will croak as loudly by day as ever they roared throughout June's sultry nights.

How deeply down the wind agitates the water I do not know, except as to shallow ponds, but let the breeze be of the gentlest, enough merely to ripple in a more lively way the glittering surface, and there is scarcely a fish that will not respond and, coming to the surface, add to the general agitation of the broken waves. Often whole schools of shiners will throw themselves out of the water, and the glint of their silvery sides will shine more resplendently than the sunlit waves. Even the mud-loving dwellers of the weedy depths will enter

#### WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

into the spirit of the scene and play as if they, too, were young and frolicsome, instead of stupid and sleepy creatures.

What's in the wind? A vast deal to every form of life that breathes the air and much to many a living being that knows it only as the outer bounds of its own home. The very dust of the petty whirlwind that dances down the highway or gathers the dead leaves of an earlier summer is often more alive than we would ever imagine could we but see it with unaided eyes. The seeds of the plant that grows upon the mountain-top may rest to-morrow in the soil of some lowland valley, many miles away. The death-laden air of the infected house may be wafted to the home where there is joy to-day and grief unspeakable to-morrow. Truly there is enough in the wind to warrant our fearing that it may sometimes prove our enemy rather than a friend. But there is ever such abundance of gentle merriment and of exuberant jollity in certain minds that one need not step aside to consider the disastrous features of a tornado. Death, taxes and tornadoes are equally certain, but we need not anticipate them.

# IN NATURE'S REALM

He that has never entered into the spirit of the October gale that scatters the red leaves of the maples, and drops upon the frost-nipped grass the nuts from stately hickories of a lowland pasture—he that has failed to do this has missed a golden opportunity to live intensely happy while the day lasted. That lively breeze which we had heard through the long night, whispering in the gloomy pines and laughing in the maze of beechen boughs, greets the coming day with prankish ways, and we hold back for the moment, with a longing for the warmth of summer mornings we so lately knew. But a plunge into frosty air is no less invigorating than into icy water. The reaction brings a glow that repays the uncomfortable cost, and then, while cool air is wholesome and safe, the water is all too likely to prove hurtful. The sluggish pulse and indolent brain are a thing of the past. As loud as the golden-winged woodpecker screams and as the blue jay screeches, so we whistle dull care away. There is a beady sparkle in every breath we draw, a sane intoxication in every lungful of the October breeze; and with what nimble fingers are gathered the precious nuts that have dropped dur-

# WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

ing the night. To gather any wild fruit is to be most happily busy. Of all occupations, it has ever seemed the most natural; more so than hunting, in that we cause no pain nor mar nature's handiwork.

Nuts, it is true, are not grown for man to eat, nor to feed the squirrels or vile worms, but it can never appear out of time and harsh for worms, squirrels and men to strive for the larger share. It would seem as if the trees anticipated such friendly struggle, and bore enough and to spare for every purpose. It is no mean privilege to be down in the meadows of a bright, October morning; it is even a greater one to be there when there is a brisk wind out of the west, and while we are sheltered from its too boisterous greeting, seated on the sunny side of the shellbark's shaggy trunk, listen to the dropping of the nuts, to the scream of the hawks, the cawing of the crows and now and then above the medley of wild cries, hear the clear whistle of the restless lark or call of the cardinal redbird.

There is never a lack of good company when October sunshine and frosty autumn winds meet upon the meadows. He who goes there at such a time with a clear conscience will return better fitted

# IN NATURE'S REALM

to meet all of life's petty vexations. For the old man it is a cure for pessimistic thought; for the youth it is a safeguard against distorted views of life. Nature provides no paradises. There are treacherous quicksands where we least expect them and roots to trip the unwary in the smoothest path, but a foretaste of earth perfected, of nature at her best, of life that is pure, painless and without blemish, is when we are free to roam the wide meadows in October, gathering the goodly fruits that the wind has scattered about our feet. Nature is then rejoicing, why should not we?

The year grows old. The bare branches of the forest trees bend helplessly before every blast of the north wind. There are now few cheery sounds except when birds bid defiance to the wild wind's wrath. Shelter that we lightly valued during summer is now the mainspring of our comfort, and the wind is welcome only when we hear it but sit the while beyond its reach, for no rambler is willingly abroad when the wintry winds take possession.

Icy cold, the wind sweeps beneath the starlit sky to-night and roars in anger in the chimney, but I am not moved by its threats. The back log glows defi-

# WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

antly, my body-guard and shield against the bitter chill of the outdoor world. No animal in its burrow, nor owl in the hollow of an old tree is more cozily at rest than am I, and better, too, than they, in that I am not asleep nor drowsy. Not a gust of the angry wind, rattling the shutters or shaking the outer doors, but aids me to bring back to brighter light the scenes of other days. Not an outing but is again enjoyed; not a bird but I hear its song; not a butterfly but I watch its flight; not a fair, fleecy cloud of the summer skies but floats again above me, and I build air-castles, blissfully lost in thought.





ACRIDES

A

Acrides, specific variations of, 69. Acris crepitans, 68. Acris gryllus, 68. Age and youth, 111, 112. Age, Ice, 38, 256, 260. Age, influence of, on powers of observation, 111. Ages, Dark, 36. Age too exacting, 110. Algæ, 66, 213. Almanacs, 79, 103. Ambitious birds and men, 104. America, South, 254. Anacharis, 67. Animal activities, how far indicative of weather-changes, 96, 203, 279. Animal intelligence, 60, 251. Animal life, effect of cold on, Animal life in meadows, 90, 92, 93, 97, 121. Animal life in winter, 238, 241, Animal life, our ignorance of, Animals, æstivation of, 272. Animals, aquatic, 70, 71, 74. Animals, locally extinct, remains Animals, snow-bound, 235.

AUTUMN Antidote for malaria, 125. April, 21, 97, 102, 103, 151, 152, 153, 232. Aquaria, advantages of, 140. Aquatic animals, 70, 71, 74. Aquatic birds, 135. Aquatic flora, 67, 213. Aquatic life, 129, 130, 133, 134, 138, 139, 213, 222. Aquatic life, our ignorance of, Aquatic snakes, 215. Aquatic spiders, 135. Archæologist, the, 110, 126. Architecture, church, and Nature's sanctuary, 41. Arrow-head, 213. Art, the potters', 123. tery, Indian. Ash, 116. Ash, as forest-tree, 178. Astronomers, evolution and, 228. Atmospheric conditions before rain, 191. Audience of one, an, 90, 92, 94. August, 83, 153, 173, 185, 186, August, the lazy month, 183. August, weeds in, 184. Autumn, 20, 79, 83, 154, 162, 170, 190, 203, 212, 232, 261, Autumn, commencement of, 241. Autumn, snow in, 234.

AVERAGE MAN

Average man, the, a happy medium, 166.

Azalea, 212.

В

Bald eagle, 220.
Baltimore oriole, 116, 173.
Baltimore oriole, nesting-habits of, 117.

Bank-swallows, nesting-habits of,

153.

Barn-swallows, 136.

Bass, see Black-bass.

Bat, squeaking of, 100.

Bat, winter habits of, 238.

Batrachians, see Frogs, Frog-like animals.

Bears, bones of, 179.

Beeches, 41, 46, 175, 176, 178, 197, 276.

Bees, 109, 110.

Beetles, 58, 92, 195, 280. See Tiger-beetle.

Belostoma, 139.

Bengoile, eagle of, 220.

Berries, greenbrier, 236.

Birch, 46, 169, 176, 245.

Birch, white, 116.

Bird-life, duration of, on earth, 172.

Birds, 19, 69, 75, 79, 81, 86, 90, 92, 96, 97, 124, 128, 140, 145, 148, 157, 170, 171, 185, 186, 191, 202, 229, 242, 266, 286,

287.

Birds and men, ambitious, 104.

Birds, aquatic, 135.

Birds, emotions of, 100, 180. Birds, fog-bound, songs of, 100.

Birds, habits of, 236.

BLUEBIRD

Birds, influence of weather on, 61, 104, 197, 236, 269, 279. Birds, migration of, 236, 253. Birds, native, a plea for, 248. Bird-song, how best described, 103. Bird-song, influencing other birds, 91, 96.

Bird-song, suggestiveness of, 104,

Birds' songs in text-books, 103. Birds, songs of, 31, 63, 115, 141, 162, 181, 192, 255, 267.

Birds' songs, significance of, 173, 196, 244, 280. Birds' songs, sweetness of, 150.

Birds, soulfulness of, 100.

Birds, warbling of, 82. Birds, winter, 265.

Birds, winter habits of, 61, 236. Bird's-eye views, why unsatisfac-

tory, 38, 269.

Bird's-nest a spider's home, 147. Bird's-nest, deserted, 20, 62, 115,

116, 147.

Bird's-nest, structure of, 152.

Bird's-nest, winter home of mouse, 62, 243.

Birds'-nests, 156.

Bittern, 74, 224.

Bitter roots, 106. Bittersweet, 181, 264.

Black-bass, 220.

Blackberry, 145.

Blackbirds, 124, 202, 203, 204,

Blackbirds, red-winged, 101, 102, 141, 200, 201.

Blacksnake, 90, 92.

Bladderwort, 125.

Bluebird, song of, 271.

Bluebird, wandering habits of, 145.

BLUEBIRDS

Bluebirds, 92, 185. Blue jay, 168, 169, 180, 241. Blue jay, October notes of, 240. Blue jay, screeching of, 284. Bobolink, 117. Bobolink, rollicking song of, 106. "Bob-white," 185. Body and brain, man's, 207. Books, knowledge of nature derived from, 42, 171, 209. Botany, winter, of Nine Spring Corner, 67. Bowlders, significance of, 35, 36, 37, 122. Brain and body, man's, 207. Brain, the, a sponge, 28. Breeding season of herons, 153. Britton, N. L., quoted, 174. Brook, an interesting, 177. Brook, bed of, 83. Brooks, babbling, 81, 82, 231. Brooks, obliterated by natural processes, 131. Brooks, once larger streams, 84. Bryant, W. C., quoted, 199. Bullfrog, croaking of, 45. Bullfrogs, habits of, 121. Bulrushes, 201. Butterflies, 31, 40, 92, 110, 190, 230, 274, 287. Button-bushes, 115, 145. Buttonwoods, 145. Buzzards, 118. Buzzard's Rest, 118.

#### C

Cabbage, see Skunk-cabbage. Calamus, 106. Calico-snake, 217, 218. Candor, 225. Cardamine, 68.
Cardinal, fog-bound, 100.
Cardinal grosbeak, 81, 99, 106, 141, 251, 285.
Cardinal grosbeak, cheerfulness of, 98, 271.
Cardinal grosbeak, favorite haunts

CHESTNUTS

of, 163, 205. Cardinal grosbeak, spiritual anatomy of a, 101.

Cardinals, colony of, 100.
Carolina wren, 78, 92, 95.
Carolina wren, song of, 103, 104.
Carp, 210.
Cat. 102. See Wildcat

Cat, 193. See Wildcat.
Cat-bird, tameness of, 149.
Cat-bird, winter food of, 236.
Cat-birds, 141, 173, 197, 280.
Catfish, 110.
Cedar fence-rails, 187, 188.
Cedar, for fencing, 186.
Cedar, killed by overgrowing

vines, 176.
Cedar, slow growth of, 186, 187.
Cedars, 183, 184, 197, 266.
Cedars, age of, 187.
Cedars, odor of, 187.
Cerebrum, the, and evolution, 228.
Chain-snake, 217, 218.

Chandelier plant, 67.
Changes in man and physical geography compared, 113.
Charm of naturalness, 158, 201.
Chat, yellow-breasted, 141, 148.
Chat, yellow-breasted, belated mi-

grating, 253. Cherries, 149. Chestnut fence-rails, 183, 188. Chestnut-oak, wrinkled bark of, 245. Chestnuts, 188.

Chestnut-trees, 53, 188. Chestnut-trees, age of, 189. Chickadee, merry song of, 75. Chickadees, 97, 241, 253, 265. Chills, an antidote for, 125. "Chimneys" of crayfish, 93. Chimney-swallows, nesting habits of, 137. Chinkapins, 240. Chipmunk, hibernation of, 238. Chipmunks, 281. Christianized pagan, 22. Christmas, outdoors at, 264. Church architecture and Nature's sanctuary, 41. Civilization, development of, 45, 51, 143. Climate, adaptation to, 241. Climate, changeableness of, 77, 234, 235, 273. Climate, influence of, on man, 51. Clouds, influence of, on landscape, 158, 191. Cold, effect of, on animal life, 235. Colonial carpentering, 187. Colonial chestnut-tree, 53. Colonial fence-rail, 183. Colonial folk, 110. Colonial kitchen, 198. Color, magic warmth of, 264. Coloration, protective, instance of, 155. Company, when undesirable, 89. Concord, Massachusetts, 208. Coniferous forests, 180. Consistency a small matter, 130. Contentment and envy, 210. Coot, habits of, 124, 135. Cope, E. D., 72, 74, 218, 226. Cope, E. D., on salamanders, 71, 73.

CHESTNUT-TREES

CUTTLE-FISH Cope, E. D., on species of Acris, 68, 69. Corner, see Nine Spring Corner. Corn-field, Indian, 187. Cougar, bones of, 179. Cow-bell, 123, 124, 125. Cowper and his squirrels, 130. Cranium, a human, 227. Crayfish, 127, 213, 222. Crayfish, "Diogenes," 93, 223. Crayfish, habits of, 223. Crayfish, hermit, "chimneys" of, 93, 94, 242. Creation and evolution, 26, 123. Creation, man's place in, 45. Creek-bank, changes of, 115, 126, 128. Creeper, crimson, 169, 176. See Tree-creeper, Trumpet-creeper. Creeper, Virginia, effect of, on tree-growth, 176. Crepitans, Acris, 68. Cress, see Water-cress. Crested tit, 78, 80, 181. Cricket, creaking of, 100, 195. Cricket-frog, rattling of, 86. Crosswicks Creek, 110, 130, 144, 146, 200. Crosswicks Creek, valley of, 122. Crosswicks meadows, 122, 137. Crows playing "tickly benders," 78. Crows, 63, 79, 116, 141, 145, 180, 244, 251, 265, 285. Crows, claims of, to protection, 247. Crows, cunning of, 250. Crows, destructiveness of, 246. Crows, evening flight of, 252. Curiosity of humanity, 21, 268.

Curiosity of wild-life, 89.

Cuttle-fish, 23.

#### DAFFODILS

D

Daffodils, 64. Dandelions, 63, 64. Dark Ages, 36. Darkness, effect of, on imagination, 147. Darwin, Charles R., 94. Dates, suggestive, 78. December, 81, 145, 185, 256, 257, 261, 262, 263. Delaware river, valley of, antiquities of man in, 123. Delaware Valley, fauna of, 179. Delaware Valley, flora of, 178. Delaware Valley, freshets in, effect of, on animal life, 74. Delaware Valley, geology of, 177. Delaware Valley, homo paleolithicus in, 260. Deluge, strange notions concerning, 35. Deserted nests, 20, 62, 115, 116, 147, 243. Devil-diver, cunning of, 136. Dewberry vines, 264. Dews, 31, 109. "Diogenes" crayfish, see Crayfish. Dismal Swamp, 30. Dispositions and habits of snakes, 218, 219. Disputation and facts, 25. Dock, 106. Doubt, teased by, 89. Dove, 86. Dragon-flies, 192. Drama of wild-life's theater, 224. Drawbridge, 110. Drawbridge, fight at, in Revolutionary war, 143.

FACT AND THEORY Duck-meat, 213. Ducks, flocks of, 204.

E

Eagle, bald, 220. Eagle of Bengoile, 220. Ears and eyes, use of, 33. Earth, knowledge of the, contempt for, 262. Earth, the, 19, 31, 32, 91, 212, 263. Earthworms, occurrence of, in winter, 58, 246. Education and ignorance, 23. Eel, 131. Egrets, snowy, comparative rarity of, 120. Elder, 68. Elk, 179. Elm, 23, 174. Elysian fields, 167. Emotions of birds, 100, 180. England, 17, 234. English folk-lore, 234, 277. English sparrow, 105, 137, 138. Envy and contentment, 210. Error, the mire of, 225. Errors of teaching, 23, 28. Evolution and astronomers, 228. Evolution and creation, 26, 123. Evolution and the cerebrum, 228. Evolution, the puzzle of, 261. Example and precept, 29. Excellence, human, 207. Expectancy, state of, 57. Eyes and ears, use of, 33. Eyes and nose, 169.

F

Fact and theory, 25, 200, 229.

#### I N D E X

FACTS AND PREJUDICE Facts and prejudice, 248. Facts, little, of great significance, 220, 257. Facts, man's relation to, 48. Faculties of youth contrasted with those of age, 112. Fairy of the wind, 274. False loose-strife, 68. Fault-finding ghostly gray-beards, Fauna associated with primitive man, 180. Fauna of Delaware Valley, 179. Fauna of the Indians, 179. Faunal changes caused by freshets in Delaware Valley, 74. Fear, plagued by, 88. February, 50, 52, 71, 78, 185, 208, 246, 261. Fence, old rail, suggestiveness of, 183, 186. Fence, old rail, zoölogy of, 183. Fence, wild-life's highway, 183, Fence-rail, an old, history of, 182. Fence-rail, colonial, 183. Fence-rail fancy, a, 182. Fence-rail, old, as fuel, 190. Fence-rail, old, suggestiveness of 183, 186. Fence-rails, cedar, 187, 188. Fence-rails, chestnut, 183, 188. Ferns, 174, 264, 267. Field and forest, 38, 85. Field-larks, 54, 55, 56. Field-mice, 247. Field-sparrow, song of, 96, 269. Finches, 56, 197. Finches in winter, 55. Fireplace, old open, 198. Fish, migration of, 83.

FOREST PRIMEVAL Fishes, 31, 85, 86, 134, 139, 144, 222, 224 226, 242. Fishes, affected by wind, 282. Fish-hawk, 220. Flag, 157. Flakes, see Snowflakes. Flicker, 241. Flies at the end of winter, 58. Flood-gate, old, 129, 131. Flora, 54. Flora aquatic, 67, 213. Flora of Delaware Valley, 178. Flora, the, of a rail fence, 189, 190. Flotsam of freshets, 90. Flowers, old-fashioned, 102. Flowers, wild, 19, 110, 157. Fly, buzzing of, 221. Flycatcher, 280. Flycatcher, great-crested, 141, 252. Flycatcher, least, 141. Fog, a cheerful, 95, 98. Fog, dissipated by sun, 107. Fog, optical effects in a, 98. Fog, sounds heard through a, 96. Fog-bound, 108. Fog-bound birds, songs of, 100. Foliage in October, 251. Folk-lore, 51, 273. Folk-lore, English, 234, 277. Folk-lore, German, 277. Folk-lore, inconsistency of, 194, 203. Folk-lore, Indian, 277. Folly of self-aggravation, 166. Folly, wisdom and, 208. Fools and philosophers, a problem for, 166. Forest and field, 38, 85. Forest areas, 237. Forest primeval, 30, 31.

FORESTS Forests, coniferous, 180. Forests in Indian days, 189. Fossils, true character of, 35. Fox-grapes, 167, 173. Fox-grapes, effect of, 174. Fox-grapes, varieties of, 173. Freshets, flotsam of, 90. Freshets in Delaware Valley, 74. Frog, 226. See Bullfrog, Cricketfrog, Wood-frog. Frog, intelligence of, 161. Frog, "peeper" or rattling, 68, 96. Frog-like animals, 68, 70. Frogs, croaking of, 96, 107, 141, 282. Frogs, green, 120. Frogs, leopard, 120. Frost, 37, 168, 184, 238, 240, 245, 262, 284. Frosted grapes, 168, 170, 177.

#### G

Gardens, birds in, 102.
Gardens, old-fashioned flowers of, 102.
Garter-snake, 219.
Geese, 28, 204, 210, 271.
Geese, "honking" of, 270.
Geogaphy, physical, and man, changes in, compared, 113.
Geology of Crosswicks meadows, 122.
Geology of Delaware Valley, 177.
Geology of Ice Age, 38, 257, 260.
German folk-lore, 277.
Ghostly gray-beards, fault-finding, 111.

Gift of letters, the, 21. Glacial time, 180. Glaciers, 38, 110, 258. Golden saxifrage, 68. Golden-winged woodpecker, 284. Goosberry hedge, 28. Grakles, purple, 78, 141. Grakles, purple, occurrence of, in heronry, 156. Grapes, frosted, 168, 170, 177. See Fox-grapes, Sugar-grapes. Grapes, inaccessible, 167, 169, Grapes, sour, 165, 168, 179, 181. Grapes, sour, Satan and, 167. Grapes, sour, suggestiveness of, Grape-vine, 113. Grape-vine swings, 177. Grape-vines, age of, 175. Grape-vines, growth of, 174, 175, 176, 179. Grape-vines, stories told of, 177. Grasshoppers, peculiar fate of, 196, 220. Gray, Asa, 173, 174. Gray, Thomas, quoted, 273. Great blue heron, 110. Great-crested flycatcher, 141, 252. See Flycatcher. Green heron, 141, 145, 151. Green heron, habits of, 150, 152, 154, 155, 156. Green snake, 219. Greenbrier berries, 236. Grosbeak, cardinal, 81, 99, 106, 141, 251, 285. Grosbeak, cardinal, cheerfulness of, 98, 271. Grosbeak, cardinal, favorite haunts of, 163, 205.

GROSBEAK

GROSBEAK

Grosbeak, cardinal, spiritnal anatomy of a, 101.
Grosbeak, rose-breasted, 106, 141, 251.
Grosbeak, rose-breasted, favorite haunt of, 163.
Grosbeak, rose-breasted, nests of, 117.
Grosbeaks' paradise, 163.
Ground-hog, hibernation of, 238.
Growth, laws of, 209.
Growth of lindens in thirteen years, 114.
Gryllus, Acris, 68.
Gulls, as scavengers, 249.
Gum-trees (Nyssa), 178, 203.
Gum-trees (Liquidambar), 178.

#### H

Habitation, human, monotony of, Habits and dispositions of snakes, 218, 219. Habits of animals, changes in, due to climatic changes, 235. Habits of birds, 61, 236. Habits of pirate-perch, 148. Hare, mad March, 63. Harmony, laws of, 28. Hawk, exhultant cry of, 76. Hawks, 63, 180, 247, 285. See Fish-hawk. Haymakers, 197. Hazelnuts, 240. Heads without bodies, 160. Health, mental, 48. Hemlocks, 163. Hermit crayfish, "chimneys" of, 93, 94, 242. See Crayfish. Heron, great blue, 110.

HUMMING-BIRDS Heron, green, 141, 145, 151. Heron, green, habits of, 150, 152, 154, 155, 156. Heron, white, threatened extinction of, 249. Heronry, 119, 150, 152, 154. Herons, 63, 225. See Nightherons. Herons, as scavengers, 249, 251. Herons, breeding season of, 153. Hibernation, 71, 238, 242. Hickories, 92, 210, 212. Historian, the, difficulties of, 177. History of a meadow-pool, 210, History of an old fence-rail, 182. History, youth and age in relation to, 113. Hog-nosed snake, 219. Holly Beach, migrating birds at, 254. Homo paleolithicus, 260. Horned larks, 63, 266. Horn-wort, 67. Houses, old, 187, 263. House-wren, 236. Human cranium, a, 227. Human excellence, 207. Human experience compared with the vine and the tree, 176. Human habitation, monotony of, Human mind, limitations of the, 38, 228, 258. Human physique, the, 88. Human progress, first step in, 260. Human vanity, weakness of, 168. Humanity, 20, 21, 186. Humility, 225, 229, 230.

Humming-birds, 190.

#### I N D E X

Hyla, Pickering's, 69, 73. Hylódes, 68. Hypnum, 67.

Ι

Ice Age, geology of, 38, 256, 260. Icebergs, 258. Icicles, 262, 263, 265, 266, 267. Icicles, beauty of, 256, 259, 260. Ignorance a spur, 226. Ignorance, through lack of effort, 38, 46. Ignorance, when not debasing, 225. Illusions due to atmospheric conditions before rain, 191. Inconsistency of folk-lore, 194, Indian corn-field, 187. Indian days, forests in, 189. Indian family, 84. Indian folk-lore, 277. Indian grass, 266. Indian pottery, 84, 93. Indian relics, 84, 93. Indian summer, 243, 244, 245. Indian talisman, 84. Indian wigwam, 84. Indians, 84, 122, 174, 277. Indians, fauna of the, 179. Individuality, plea for, 29. Infancy, pernicious influences on, 26. Insect-life at end of winter, 58. Insect-life, 160, 185. Insect-life destroyed by crows, Insects, aquatic, 139, 160, 213. Insects, sounds made by, 141, 195. Insipid men and women, 45. Instinct, savage, in man, 180.

LAKE ONTARIO
Intelligence, animal, 60, 251.
Implements of chase, 123.
Island, growth of an, 126, 128.
Ivy, poison, 47.

Ī

January, 204, 262.
Jay, 107.
Jay, blue, 168, 169, 180, 241.
Jay, blue, October notes of, 240.
Jay, blue, screeching of, 284.
Jersey meadows, 124.
July, 153.
Jumping-mouse, hibernation of, 238, 243.
June, 81, 102, 111, 124, 141, 152, 162, 172, 178, 199, 282.
June roses, 168.
June "snow-storm," 149.

#### K

Kalm, Peter, quoted, 187, 188.

'Kenilworth,'' quoted, 209.

Kill-dee plover, 91, 92.

Kingfishers, 115, 128, 141.

Kitchen, colonial, 198.

Knowledge, acquisition of, 25, 34, 42.

Knowledge, elusiveness of, 229.

Knowledge guarded by humility, 229, 230.

Knowledge, uncertainty surrounding all, 225, 230.

L

Labrusca, Vitis, 173.
Lack of self-reliance, cause of, 31.
Lake Ontario contrasted with meadow-pool, 213.

LANDMARKS

Landmarks, 127. Landscape, 23, 31, 91, 119, 158, 171, 186, 189, 191, 249, 256, 264.

Land-tortoise, 242.

Larks, horned, 63, 266. See Field-larks, Meadow-larks.

Law, Nature's, 24. Laws of growth, 209.

Laws of harmony, 28. Laziness, luxury of, 163.

Lazy month, the, 183. Leaf, autumn, suggestiveness of the, 20.

Least flycatcher, 141. See Flycatcher.

Leopard frogs, 120.

Lesson taught by a dismal swamp, 102.

Letters, the gift of, 21.

Life, animal, in meadows, 90, 92, 93, 97, 121.

Life, animal, in winter, 235, 238, 241, 242.

Life, animal, our ignorance of,

Life, aquatic, 129, 130, 133, 134, 138, 139, 213, 222.

Life, aquatic, our ignorance of, 223.

Lilac bushes, old, 189.

Linden Bend, 109.

Lindens, 109, 110, 119, 197. Lindens, growth of, in thirteen

years, 114.

Linnet, 124. Literature, 33.

Lizard, water, see Salamanders. Locusts, as forest-trees, 178.

Loose-strife, false, 68.

Luxury of laziness, 163.

MAY

M

Madrigal, a marsh, 199, 201, 202, 205.

Malaria, antidote for, 125. Man a creature of brutish un-

reason, 248.

Man and physical geography, changes in, compared, 113.

Man and the north, 51, 52. Man and the tropics, 51.

Man, his place in creation, 45.

Man, influence of climate on, 51. Man, origin of, a mystery, 123.

Man, paleolithic, 228, 260. Man, primitive, 123, 180, 270.

Man, savage instinct in, 180.

Man, the average, a happy medium, 166.

Manhood, perfection of, 207. Mankind's shortcomings, 88.

Man's brain and body, 207. Man's limitations, 257.

Man's relation to facts, 48. See Facts.

Man's rise and progress, 123.

Man's work, uncertainty of its stability, 127.

Maple, curious growth of, 41.

Maples, 117, 284. March, 63, 69, 238.

Marsh madrigal, a, 199, 201,

202, 205. Marshland, 205.

Marsh-wren, 141.

Maryland yellow-throats, 115.

Mastodon, 180.

May, 63, 97, 102, 104, 106, 172, 181, 201, 212, 243.

### I N D E X

MAY BLOSSOMS May blossoms, 20, 168. May, nest-building in, 20, 242. May, peculiarities of month of, May, poetry of, 180. May, 1898, rainfall of, 144. Meadow, how builded up, 82. Meadow-grass, yellow, suggestiveness of, 265, 266. Meadow-larks, 266, 285. Meadow-mouse, 148, 204. Meadow-music, 124. Meadow-pool, history of a, 210, Meadow-pool, secrets of a, 230. Meadows, 18, 78, 91, 120, 122, 141, 178, 215, 221, 224. Meadows, animal life in, 90, 92, 93, 97, 121. Meadows, Crosswicks, 137. Meadows, Jersey, 124. Men, ambitious birds and, 104. Mental health, 48. Mental honesty, 167. Mental slavery, 27, 44. Mental sluggishness, 115. Mice, 90, 184, 224. See Fieldmice. Mice, favorite haunt of, 186. Mice, in winter, 58. Mice, selection of nests by, 62. Microcosmic philosopher, the, 209. Midautumn, 141, 246. Midsummer, 83, 144, 232. Midsummer sunshine, 21, 168. Midwinter, 185, 262. Migration of birds, 236, 253. Migration of fish, 83. Mill Creek, aquatic life at, 129. Mill-dam, 110.

MUD-MINNOWS Mill-pond, 18, 223. Mind, freedom of the, 21, 44. Mind, the commonplace, 208. Mind, the human, limitations of, 38, 228, 258. Mink, cunning of, 134, 159. Mink, habits of, 134, 135. Minks, black, 204. Minnows, 130, 213. See Mudminnow. Minnows, brilliant colors of, 85. Minnows, playfulness of, 69. Minstrel, the wandering, of the woods, 170. Mole, burrow of, 58. Mole, star-nosed, 134, 135. Mole-cricket, burrowing, effects of, on banks of streams, 127. Monsters, stories of, how they originate, 160. Moral cowardice, and one of its penalties, 88. Mosquito-bite, poison of, an antidote for malaria, 125. Mosquitoes, effect of, on cattle and man, 125. Mosquitoes, larvæ of, trapped by bladderwort, 125. Moss, 115, 266. Mouse, 130. See Jumpingmouse, Meadow-mouse, Woodmouse. Mouse, white-footed, 62. Mouse, white-footed, nest of, 243. Mouse, wild, 59, 60. Mud, half-dried, the scene of active animal life, 160. Mud, suggestiveness of, 159. Mud-minnows, migration of, 83,

MUD-SHAD

Mud-shad, 223. Music, 28, 55, 102. Music akin to sunshine, 92. Music and raindrops, 104. Music, classification of birds by, Music, Nature's, 210. Music of the marsh, 201. Music of the meadows, 124. "Music of the spheres," 279. Musk-ox, 180. Muskrat, 127, 202, 224. Mussel, 131. Mussels, intelligence and habits of, 132, 133. Myriophyllum, 67. Myrtle-bird, 236. Myths, Oriental, 35.

N Nameless nooks, 206, 208, 221. Native birds, a plea for, 248. Naturalist, a task worthy of a, 102. Naturalist, success as a, 93. Naturalists, where they differ, 100. Naturalists' note-books, novelty in, 193. Naturalness, charm of, 158, 201. Nature, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 40, 45, 57, 69, 80, 81, 82, 86, 88, 93, 96, 103, 107, 108, 111, 123, 125, 141, 142, 143, 168, 193, 199, 221, 226, 230, 231, 256, 261, 269, 277, 279, 286. Nature, contemplation of, 258. Nature, friendship of, 273. Nature, our ignorance of, 36, 46.

NIGHT-HERON Nature, in books, 42, 171, 209. Nature, indifference to, 36. Nature in Scotland, 124. Nature, man's relation to, 42, Nature, never disappointing, 144. Nature not a deceiver, 126. Nature not communicative, 169. Nature, phenomena of, 257. Nature reclaiming abandoned work of man, 129. Nature, sound in, appreciation of, Nature's drama, 247. Nature's humbler phases, 259. Nature's May-day jubilee, 201. Nature's moods, 149, 200. Nature's music, 124, 201, 210. Nature's realm, 255. Nature's sanatorium, 178. Nature's sanctuaries, 41, 42, 158. Nature's temples, 85. Nature's tragedies, one of, 196. Nature-study, not a task, 44. Nature's underside of things, 130. Nature's workshops, 258. Nepa, 139. Nest, old, a spider's home, 147. Nest-building, 20, 152, 242. Nests, deserted, 20, 62, 115, 116. Nests, old, occupied by mice, 243. Nests, old, suggestiveness of, 116. Nettle, 106. New Jersey, 124, 171, 186, 277. New Jersey, southern, birds wintering in, 254. Newton, Sir Isaac, 257. Niagara, 256. Night-heron, 119, 150.

Night-heron, heronry of, 150. Night-heron, occurrence of in winter, 156. Nightingale, 209. Ninebark cove, 150, 157, 162. Ninebark, profuse bloom of, 148, Nine Spring Corner, 69, 72, 75. Nine Spring Corner, physical features of, 65. Nine Spring Corner, winter botany of, 66, 67. Nine Spring Corner, zoölogy of, 68, 75. Nooks, nameless, 206. North Star, 50, 51, 52, 57, 64. North, the, influence on man of, 51, 52, 61. Nose and eyes, 169. Notonecta, 139. November, 138, 238, 244, 263, Nut-gathering, 284. Nuthatch, harsh voice of, 162,

NIGHT-HERON

#### 0

Nuthatches, 61, 163, 241, 265.

Nuthatch, red-bellied, 253.

Nuts, 284, 285.

Nuthatch, white-bellied, 162.

Oak, scarlet, 41.
Oak, scarlet, foliage of, in winter, 264.
Oaks, 23, 46, 59, 61, 78, 98, 99, 174, 176, 180, 193, 197, 204, 254, 269. See Chestnut-oak.
Oaks, age of, 175.
Oaks, groves of, 85, 178.
Oaks, white, 188.

OWLS

Observation, accuracy of, 111.
Observation, care required in, 60.
Observers, why they contradict one another, 128.
October, 162, 166, 167, 168, 170, 171, 172, 174, 178, 181, 188, 201, 236, 240, 243, 245, 284, 285, 286.
October, characteristic features of, 199.

October, foliage in, 251.
Old beliefs, 233.

Old colonial folk, 110. Old customs, 233. Old furniture, 233.

Old heads and young eyes, 114. Old houses, 187. Old-fashioned flowers, 102. Omen, 142.

Ontario, Lake, contrasted with meadow-pool, 213. Opportunity, improvement of, 60. Oriental myths, 35.

Origin of man, a mystery, 123.
Origin of tales of monsters, 160.

Oriole, Baltimore, 116, 173. Oriole, Baltimore, nesting-habits of, 117. Orioles, 251, 280.

Omithologist, the, 171. Otters, 201, 204. Outdoor people, why never dis-

appointing, 207.
Outdoors at Christmas, 264.

Oven-bird, 115, 197.
Overestimation our worst enemy,

Owls, 30, 247, 287. Owls, nesting-habits of, 153. PAGAN

Р

Pagan Christianized, 23. Paleolithic man, 227, 260. See Primitive man. Pedagogic tyranny, 25. Pee-wee, nesting of, 117, 138. Pee-wee, wood, 156. Pennsylvania, 74. Perfection, human, 207. Philosopher, the future, 261. Philosopher, the microcosmic, 209. Philosopher, the village, 208. Philosophers, fools and, a problem for, 166. Philosophers, the old, 226. Philosophy, 159. Phlox, 157. Phœbe-bird, 97, 117. Phrasing of bird's song, 103. Physical features of Nine Spring Corner, 65. Physique, the human, 88. Pickerel-weed, 213. Pike, 130. Pines, 276, 284. Pirate-perch, habits of, 148. "Pierce On the Weather," 244. Plant-life, aquatic. See Aquatic Plant-life, relative abundance of, 66. Plant-life, perpetuation of, through insect agency, 207. Plover, kill-dee, 91, 92. Poætquissings Creek, aquatic spiders in, 135. Poetry of May, 180. Point of view, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 62, 114, 183, 193, 260.

Poison ivy, 47. Pond-weed, 67. Potters' art, 123. Pottery, Indian, 84, 93. Precept and example, 29. Prehistoric man, 227. Prehistoric time, 52, 110, 123, Prejudice, facts and, 248. Primeval man's first spear, 260. Primitive man, 123, 270. Primitive man, fauna associated with, 180. Progress, human, first step in, 260. Progress, rise and, of man, 123. Protective coloration, instance of, Psychology, 59, 72, 100, 105, 215, 250, 270. "Puff-adder," 219. Purple grakles, 78, 141. Purple grakles, occurrence of in heronry, 156. Purple martin, habits of, 136.

RAIL FENCE

#### Q

Quail, "Bob-white," 185. Quaker meeting-yards,oaks in, 188. Quakerism, of colonial days, 177. Quakers, 276. "Quoks," 119.

#### R

Rabbit, 63.
Rabbit-tracks, 234.
Rail fence, the flora of a, 189, 190.
Rail fence, old, 182.
Rail fence, old, suggestiveness of, 183, 186.

RAIL FENCE Rail fence, old, zoölogy of, 183. Rail pile, 183, 185, 189. Rail pile, zoölogy of, 186. Rails, see Fence-rails. Rain and snow in winter, 238. Rain, conditions before, 191, 194, 196. Raindrops and music, 104. Rainfall, 144. Ranatra, 139. Red-bellied nuthatch, 253. Redbirds, 96, 205. Red-eyed vireo, 141. Redstart, 115, 141, 253, 280. Relics, Indian, 84, 93. Reptiles, 242. Revolutionary fight drawbridge, 143. Rise and progress of man, 123. River-weed, 213. Robin, in winter, 236, 245. Robins, 54, 55, 56, 104, 107, 124, 280. Robins, peculiar nesting-sites of, 138. Rocks, 31, 35, 37. Roots, bitter, 106. Rose-breast, sunrise song of, 251. Rose-breasted grosbeak, 106, 141, 251. Rose-breasted grosbeak, favorite haunt of, 163. Rose-breasted grosbeak, nests of,

S

Saccharina, Vitis, 173. Salamanders, 69, 72, 75.

Rose-bush, old, 189, 194.

Roses, 23, 102, 168, 190.

Salamanders, habitat of, 71, 74. Salamanders, habits of, 70, 73. Salamanders, varieties of, 70, 71, 74. Salmon, 85. Sanatorium, Nature's, 178. Sanctuaries, Nature's, 41, 42, 158. Sand, a grain of, confusion from, Sand, once bed of brook, 131. Sand, transported by wind and water, 38, 82, 212. Sandpiper, 115, 205. Sandpiper, spotted, 141, 159. Sandstone, how formed, 131. Sassafras, 106, 184. Sassafras, vine-clad, 176. Satan and sour grapes, 167. Savage, a cultivated, 207. Savage instinct in man, 180. Savage man, see Paleolithic man, Primeval man, Primitive man. Saxifrage, golden, 68. Scotland, Nature in, 124. Scuttle-bugs, 221. Seeds carried by wind, 283. Self-abasement and ignorance, Self-aggravation, folly of, 166. Self-reliance, lack of, cause of, Senses, the five, 36. September, 79, 111, 153, 156, 234, 264. Serpent, tongue of, 215. Shad, see Mud-shad. Shade, comparative lack of life in, Shadows of insects, under water, 222.

SHADOWS

SHINERS

Shiners, glitter of, in water, 282. Shellbark, shaggy bark of, 285.

Showers, summer, 110, 158, 281. Shrike, 253.

Significance, great, of little facts, 220, 257.

Significance of bowlders, 35, 36, 37, 122.

Skaters, 221.

Skunk, the, "as he ought to be," 167.

Skunk-cabbage, 68, 174, 208. Slavery, mental, 27, 44.

Sluggishness, mental, 115.

Snails, 129.

Snake, blunt-headed, 218.

Snake charming birds, 219. Snake, green, 219.

Snake, hog-nosed, 219.

Snake stories, 214.

Snakes, 129, 130, 192, 222, 226. See Blacksnake, Calico-snake, Chain-snake, Garter-snake.

Snakes, aquatic, 215.

Snakes, habits and dispositions of, 218, 219.

Snow and rain in winter, 238. Snow in autumn, 234.

Snow, weather-proverbs concerning, 233, 234, 239.

Snowbirds, 253. Snow-bound animals, 235. Snow-drift, remnant of, 64.

Snowfall, formerly greater, 235, 237, 239.

Snowflakes, 232, 233, 240, 243, 253, 255.

"Snow-storm," June, 149. Snowy egrets, 120.

Song-birds, 91, 145.

SPIDERS

Songs, birds', in text-books, 103. Songs, birds', significance of, 173,

196, 244, 280.

Songs, birds', sweetness of, 150. Songs of birds, 28, 31, 63, 96, 115, 141, 162, 181, 192, 255, 267, 269. See Bird-song.

Song-sparrow, 141, 173, 266. Song-sparrow, cheerfulness

song of, 103, 104, 106, 107, 181, 186.

Song-sparrow, inspiring effect of song of, 92.

Song-sparrow, old-fashioned song of, 102, 105.

Song-sparrow, semi-domesticity of, 105. Song-sparrow, significance

name, 103.

Song-sparrows, favorite haunts of, т 86.

Song-sparrow's nest, 128. Soulfulness in birds, 100. Sound, in nature, appreciation of,

194. Sour grapes, 165, 168, 179, 181. Sour grapes, Satan and, 167.

Sour grapes, suggestiveness of, 166.

South America, 254. Sparrow, English, 105,-137, 138. Sparrow, white-throated, 205.

Sparrows, 63, 185, 193, 202, 280. See Field-sparrow, Songsparrow, Swamp-sparrow, Treesparrow.

Spatter-dock, 67, 157, 213. Spawning ground, 83. Spider, mud-dwelling, 160. Spiders, 58, 90, 186. Spiders, aquatic, 135.

SPIDER'S HOME Spider's home in a bird's-nest, 147. Spike-rush, 67. Spiræ, 145, 157. Spiritual anatomy of a cardinal grosbeak, 101. Spring, 55, 85, 91, 103, 185, 190, 240, 261, 262, 269. Spring, mildness of, 80. Springs, 52, 65, 78, 144, 212. Springs, temperature of, 66, 83. Sprout-land, 115. Squirrels, 61, 130, 184, 285. Squirrels' highway, 61, 188. Squirrels seeking shelter, 180, 281. Star, North, 50, 51, 52, 57, 64. Starwort, see Water-starwort. Stepping-stones, 122, 170. Stillcreep, Job, quoted, 131. Structure of bird's-nest, 152. Study, importance of, 126. Sugar-grapes, 173. Summer, 20, 55, 66, 67, 71, 97, 117, 151, 154, 157, 162, 172, 185, 190, 193, 196, 200, 212, 213, 219, 233, 246, 251, 261, 263, 269, 270, 284, 286. Summer greenness at end of winter, 57. Summer, epitomized, 264. Summer, Indian, 243, 244, 245. Summer showers, 110, 158, 281. Summer, traces of, in winter, 264. Summer warblers, 141, 253. See Warblers. Summer, wild-life of, 241. Sunfish, strange appearance of, Sunlight, effect of intense, 192.

Sunlight, influence of, 56, 158. Sunshine akin to music, 92. Sunshine, excess of life in, 62. Superstition, prevalence of, 142, 273. Swallows, 280. See Bank-swallows, Barn-swallows, Chimneyswallows. Swallows, sensitiveness to cold, 236. Swamp, a dismal, lesson taught by, 102. Swamp, Dismal, 30. Swamp-sparrow, 141, 202. Swans, 28, 210. Swings, grape-vine, 177.

TIT

#### Т

Talisman, Indian, 84. Taylor, Bayard, 33. Teaching, errors of, 23, 28. Terns, as scavengers, 249. Terns, persecution of, 249. Theater, drama of wild-life's, Theorizing, danger of, 200, 229. Theory, fact and, 200, 229. Thistles, 192. Thoreau, 30, 88, 208, 213. Thoreau, quoted, 25, 263. Thrushes, 91, 100, 106, 124, 149, 208, 211, 251, 279. See Water-thrush, Wood-thrush. "Tickly benders," 78. Tiger-beetle, 160, 192. Time, glacial, 180. Time, prehistoric, 52, 110, 123, 204. Timidity of wild-life, 89, 117. Tit, crested, 78, 80, 181.

TOADS

Toads, 141. See Tree-toad. Tortoise, see Land-tortoise. Tracks, rabbit's, 234. Tragedies, one of Nature's, 196. Travelers on a rail fence, 183. Treasures of wild-life in a millpond, 223. Tree-creeper, 61, 265. Trees, 18, 19, 31, 35, 40, 41, 75, 98, 99, 110, 144, 147, 156, 163, 164, 175, 178, 209, 213, 230, 276, 285. See Ash, Birch, Chestnut-tree, etc. Trees, age of, 189. Trees, growth of, in thirteen years, 114. Trees overturned, changes caused by, 128. Trees, shelter afforded by, 142, 197. Tree-sparrow, 253.

Tree-toad, 69, 194.

Tritons, 74.

man, 51. Trumpet-creeper, 190.

Truth, 225. Tulip-poplar, 145.

Tulip-tree, 176.

Turtle, mud, 40, 110.

U

Turtle, 110, 131, 148, 223, 226,

See Land-tortoise.

Tropics, the, influence of, on

Universe, the, 263.
Unjust ways of the world, 220.
Upland and meadows, animal
life of, on foggy morning,
97.
Upland, how lowered, 82.

WALNUT

V

Vagaries, 182, 186. Valley, Delaware, see Crosswicks Creek, valley of; Delaware river, Delaware Valley. Vanity, weakness of human, 168. Variety, necessity of, 17. "Views Afoot," 33. Views afoot, advantages of, 34, 36, 49. Views, bird's-eye, 38, 269. View, point of, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 62, 114, 183, 193, 260. Village philosopher, the, 208. Vine-clad trees, 175, 176. Vines, dewberry, 264. Vines, see Grape-vines. Violets, 23, 102, 179, 230. Vireo, red-eyed, 141. Vireo, warbling, 141. Vireo, white-eyed, 141. Vireo, white-eyed, song of, 142. Vireo, yellow-throated, 116. Vireos, 156. Virginia creeper, effect of, on treegrowth, 176. Vitis labrusca, 173. Vitis saccharina, 173. Voice of the wind, 273, 276, 277. Vultures, 118. Vultures, sense of smell of, 119.

W

Walking, substitute for, 142. Walking, when mechanical, 53. Walnut, 46.

WALNUT Walnut, slow growth of, 178. Walrus, 180. Warblers, 106, 156, 197, 251, Warblers, sensitiveness to cold, 236. Warblers, summer, 141, 253. Warbling of birds, 82. Warbling vireo, 141. Waste-land, 120, 144, 158, 160, Waste-land revisited, 109. Water, running, suggestiveness of, 80, 81, 178. Water-bugs, 139. Water-cress, 68. Water-fowl, flight of, 144. Water-life, see Aquatic life. Water-lizard, see Salamanders. Watermelons, 248. Water-snake, 217. Water-starwort, 67. Water-thrush, 205. Watson's Crossing, 122. Weasels, 184. Weather bulletins, 276. Weather, capricious, of April, 21. Weather, influence of, on birds, 61, 104, 197, 236, 269, 279. Weather influencing flowers, 207. Weather, predicting as to, 80, 276. Weather, "samples of," 77. Weather, winter, peculiarities of, Weather-proverbs concerning snow, 233, 234, 239. Weather-wisdom of animals, 96, 203, 279. Weed, see Pond-weed.

Weeds in August, 184. Weeds, ugliness of, 39. White birch, 116. White herons, threatened extinction of, 249. See Herons. White-bellied nuthatch, 162. White-eyed vireo, 141. White-eyed vireo, song of, 142. White-footed mouse, 62. White-footed mouse, nest of, White-throated sparrow, 205. Whortleberry, the real, 30. Wigwam, Indian, 84. Wild grapes, see Fox-grapes, Frost-grapes, etc. Wild mouse, 59, 60. "Wild-buck," 124. Wildcat, 179, 180, 204. Wild flowers, 19, 110, 157. Wild-life, effect of persecution on, 120. Wild-life, how best observed, 89, 193. Wild-life, how to see it and see as it sees, 193. Wild-life in August, 185. Wild-life in meadows, 90, 92, 93, Wild-life in mill-pond, 223. Wild-life in summer, 185, 241. Wild-life in winter, 61, 242. Wild-life, rarely surprised by cold weather, 242. Wild-life, timidity of, 89, 117. Wild-life's highway, rail fence as, 183, 184. Wild-life's theater, 224. Willows, 117, 209. Wind and water, sand carried by, 38, 82, 212.

WIND

WIND

Wind, effect of, on aquatic life, 282.

Wind, fairy of the, 274.

Wind, folk-lore concerning, 277. Wind, forerunner of storms, 278.

Wind, in autumn, 271.

Wind, infection carried by, 283.

Wind, in spring, 269. Wind, in summer, 271, 274.

Wind in winter, 271,

Wind, in winter, 286. Wind, message of the, 268, 272,

273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 279,

283.

Wind, seeds carried by, 283.

Wind, sound carried by, 269.

Wind, superstitious regard of,

Wind, the south, 268, 271.

Wind, track of the, 279.

Wind, voice of the, 273, 276,

"Winds of the Globe," 271.

Winter, 33, 54, 66, 68, 79, 103, 149, 156, 162, 171, 190, 204,

212, 213, 219, 229, 230, 232,

233, 234, 237, 238, 239. Winter, animal life in, 238, 241,

Winter birds, 265.

Winter botany of Nine Spring

Corner, 67.

Winter, end of, 57, 86, 91.

Winter foods of birds, 236.

Winter habits of birds, 61, 236, 245.

Winter habits of animals, changes in, due to climatic changes, 235. See Hibernation.

Winter, indoor thoughts concerning, 63.

WORMS

Winter, insect-life at end of, 58. Winter, last day of, 77, 79, 83,

Winter, summer greenness at end of, 57.

Winter sunshine, 261, 266.

Winter sunshine, its true character, 264.

Winter, traces of, in summer, 263.

Winter weather, peculiarities of, 62.

Winter, wreckage of, 90.

Winterberry, 245.

Wintergreen, 267.

Winter's ice, 110.

Winter's strength and beauty in icicles, 256.

Winter-wren, 236, 253.

Wisdom and folly, 208.

Wolves, bones of, 179.

Wood pee-wee, 156.

Wood-frog, characteristics of,

Wood-mouse, 92.

Woodpecker, 61.

Woodpecker, golden-winged, 284. Woods, the wandering minstrel of the, 170.

Wood-thrush, 141, 148, 173, 191.

Wood-thrush, song of, 181, 193, 196.

Workshops, Nature's, 258.

World, the, 17, 25, 26, 27, 31, 35, 38, 42, 45, 46, 51, 52, 56, 57, 60, 95, 107, 164, 169, 207, 209, 210, 226, 228,

World, the, unjust ways of, 220. Worms, 218, 285.

WRECKAGE
Wreckage of winter, 90.
Wren, Carolina, 78, 92, 95.
Wren, Carolina, song of, 103, 104.
Wren, nervous energy of the, 104.
Wrens, 186, 193. See Housewren, Marsh-wren, Winter-

#### Y

wren.

"Ye Olden Time," 233.
Yellow meadow-grass, suggestiveness of, 265, 266.
Yellow-breasted chat, 141, 148.
Yellow-breasted chat, belated migrating, 253.

Zoölogy
Yellow-throats, Maryland, 115.
Yellow-throated vireo, 116.
Young eyes, advantages of, 111.
Young eyes and old heads, 114.
Youth equipped to understand,
112.
Youth has no history, 113.
Youth, to criticize, from force of
habit, quite unsafe, 112.
Youth's faculties contrasted with

#### $\mathbf{Z}$

those of age, 112.

Zoölogy of an old rail fence, 183. Zoölogy of an old rail pile, 186. Zoölogy of Nine Spring Corner, 68, 75.





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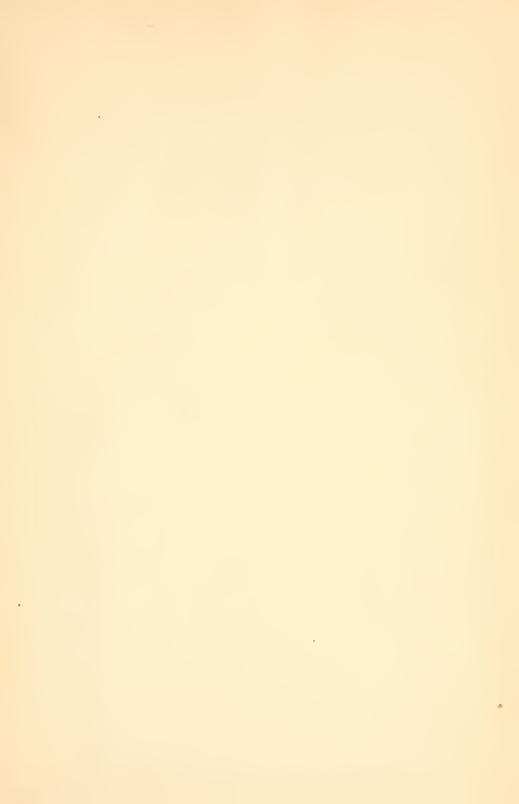
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